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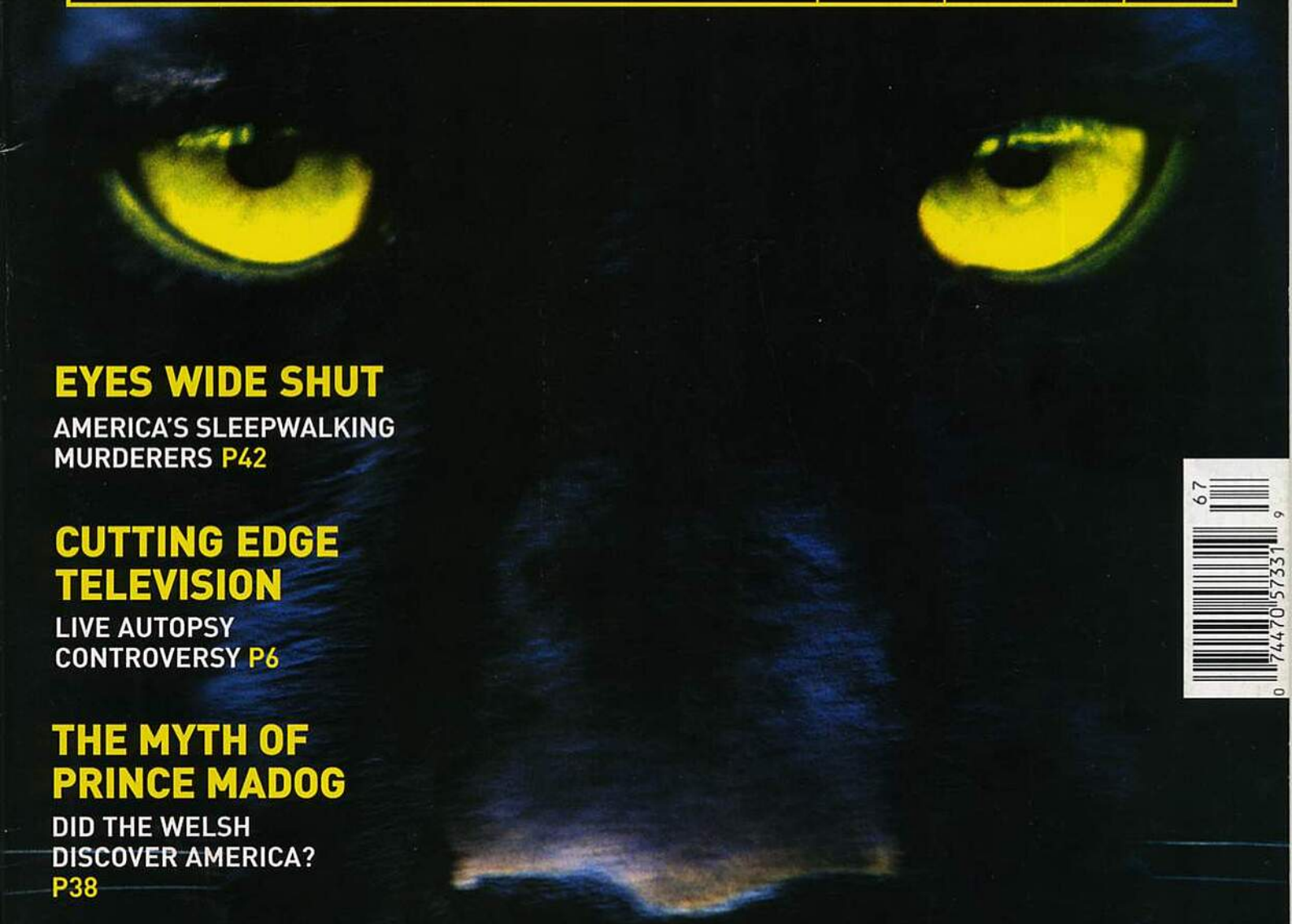
FORTEAN TIMES

THE WORLD OF STRANGE PHENOMENA | FT 167 | MAR 2003 | $6.25 CAN $6.95



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FORTEAN TIMES

THE JOURNAL OF STRANGE PHENOMENA | WWW.FORTEANTIMES.COM

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EDITORIAL

SOCIETY OF THE SPECTACLE

VILE BODIES

Towards the end of 2002, two very different spectacles attracted both media coverage and controversy. While the good citizens of Kaduna, Nigeria, were rioting in the streets over the Miss World contest, the fashionable denizens of London's Brick Lane were enjoying the UK's first public autopsy for 170 years, transmitted live by Channel 4 TV to the rest of the nation (see p6).

With the case of Amina Lawal, sentenced to death by stoning for adultery, making international headlines, Nigeria was hardly the ideal venue for Miss World, but when Lagos-based newspaper *This Day* published an article suggesting that Mohammed might have married one of the Miss World contestants, all hell broke loose. Angry Moslem demonstrators torched the paper's Kaduna office and set out on a violent rampage that left over 200 people dead and 11,000 homeless. When the unrest began to spread to Nigeria's capital, Abuja, the Miss World organisation announced that the bevy of beauty queens was fleeing to London, where the show would go on.

British commentators were quick to object. As London Mayor Ken Livingstone said, "It defies belief that after Miss World has brought tragedy and strife to Africa its organisers should think it appropriate to carry on with the razzamataz as if nothing had happened." Behind such moral outrage one detects a more powerful sentiment – embarrassment. Our rejection of this particular spectacle is based not so much on morality (like that of Nigeria's Moslems) but on taste. Miss World is, quite simply, too naff for First World consumption. The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu once proposed that a key marker of 'sophisticated' as opposed to 'barbarous' taste was its rejection of conventional notions of beauty and subject matter in favour of the disturbing and difficult, and a removal of the ethical from the æsthetic realm. His working-class respondents, for instance, tended to favour sunsets or tigers as suitable subjects for photographs and paintings, while middle-class, urban sophisticates opted for cabbages and car crashes; which may go some way to explaining why Londoners paid £12 a head to watch a German in a silly hat carve up the corpse of an old alcoholic.

It might well, in the wake of Damien Hirst's pickled menagerie, be art; it could, conceivably, be education or even science of a sort – but Prof von Hagens' televised autopsy was chiefly significant as *entertainment* – at least for the post-Cronenberg generation of car-crash connoisseurs. Earlier the same evening, Channel 4 had shown the first instalment of *Celebrity Big Brother*, and it was hard not to feel that reality TV, with a smiling von Hagens leading the way, had quietly transgressed what the media were calling "the last taboo" with complete ease. Von Hagens, of course, could have stepped straight from David Cronenberg's *Dead Ringers*, in which one of the Mantle twins proposes beauty contests for the insides of our bodies – "you know, best kidney, most perfectly developed spleen". Whether you see him as a latter-day Dr Mengele – and his plastinated corpses can't help but recall those beautiful glass women so beloved of Nazi scientists – or a crusader against medical elitism and obfuscation, Von Hagens' major impact is as showman and entertainer, steering our jaded, collective gaze away from bikini-clad flesh to what lies beneath it. Get ready for *Dead Celebrity Big Brother Beauty Contest: Ex-Stars Dissected* – coming soon to a TV near you.

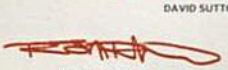
ON THE PROWL

Our lead feature this month looks at Britain's Alien Big Cats. These enigmatic felids constitute one of the most widely experienced fortean mysteries in Britain, one which *FT* has followed since the early 1970s, encompassing inconclusive evidence, wildly varying descriptions, rash generalisations and fruitless big game hunts. While it seems likely that breeding populations of several feline species exist round the country, the amazing ubiquity of sightings from the wilds of Dartmoor and the Scottish Highlands to downtown Gloucester and the London suburbs poses problems for a purely naturalistic explanation, even allowing for over-enthusiastic misidentifications. Some of the close ABC encounters show striking parallels with the "black dog" encounters of previous centuries, which are by no means confined to folklore, although contemporary reports are thin on the ground. As with many branches of forteana, there is room for more than one explanation. Could some of these beasts be less flesh-and-blood than others? At any event, the Peak Panther or the Fen Tiger are potent – and curiously comforting – symbols of untamed nature, beyond the reach of an over-regulated and predictable society.

UNCONVENTION 2003

This year's UnCon is shaping up to be one of the most exciting yet. Confirmed speakers include the legendary maverick psychologist Stan Gooch on our Neanderthal heritage, cryptozoologist Loren Coleman on the intimate secrets of Bigfoot's sex-life, and Graham Hancock, returning to update us on his quest for lost civilisation. All this plus: decadent saints, mad inventors, magical mushrooms, the Angels of Mons and Buffy the Vampire Slayer! See p56 for more information and to buy tickets, or visit the UnCon website - http://www.unconvention2003.com/ for the latest updates and online ordering.

DAVID SUTTON



BOB RICKARD

PAUL SIEVEKING

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY 'FORTEAN'?

FORTEAN TIMES was founded in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort.

Fort observed that scientists argued according to their beliefs rather than the rules of evidence, and inconvenient data was ignored, discredited or explained away (which is different from explaining).

He spent years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Library. He set out his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

His dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses his philosophy of Continuity, in which everything is in an intermediate state between extremes. He had ideas of the universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena.

He coined the term 'teleportation' and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space.

However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

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CHRIS BUTLER

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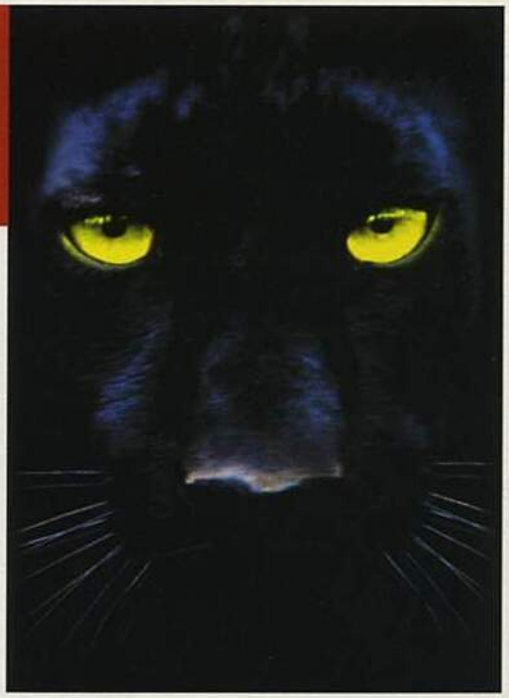

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SEE PAGE 56 FOR DETAILS

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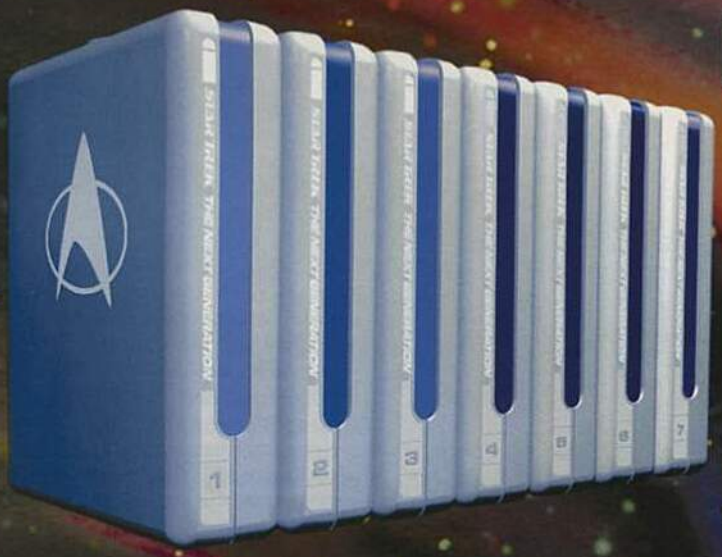

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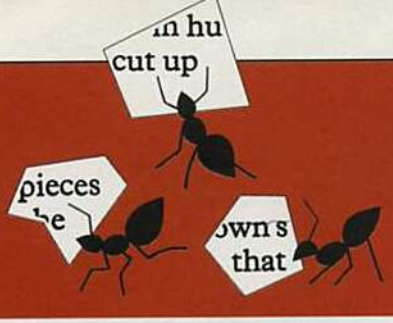

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Lords of the Church of Dust
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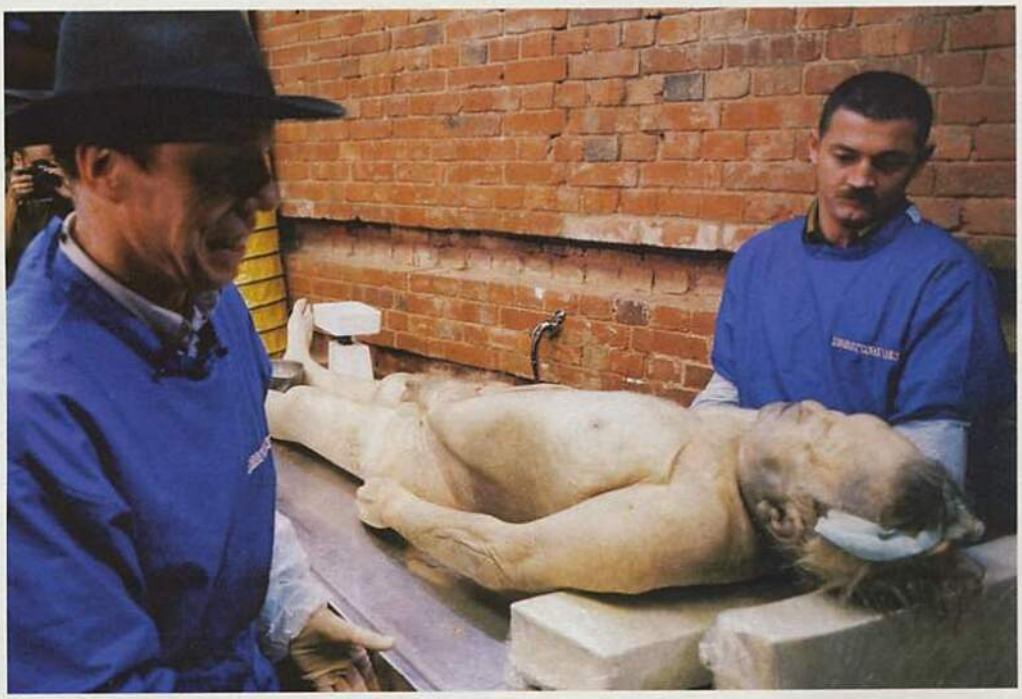
THE CUTTING EDGE

Plastinator stages Britain's first public autopsy in 170 years – for live television.



SMILE, YOU'RE ON TV: Von Hagens prepares to get stuck in.

MIKE TROW

PROFESSOR GUNTHER VON HAGENS, Inventor of the 'plastination' process and mastermind of the hugely successful 'Body Worlds' exhibition, has carried out Britain's first public autopsy in 170 years. On 20 November 2002, in an art gallery in East London's Brick Lane, von Hagens dissected the corpse of a 72-year-old German man before an audience of some 500 paying spectators and cameras from Channel 4, which in turn broadcast the entire autopsy live to over a million British television viewers.

Originally, the autopsy was to be performed on a 33-year-old, epileptic German woman who had died suddenly but, after a pressure group forced a change of plan, von Hagens instead sliced into a 72-year-old German man, an alcoholic who had died of heart failure. Both subjects were drawn from the ever-growing band of people (mostly German, but recently joined by British supporters) who are donating their bodies to Prof von Hagens for post mortem plastination – and presumably, they hope, a prime spot in his travelling 'Body Worlds' show.

Wearing his fedora, he took a saw to the skull

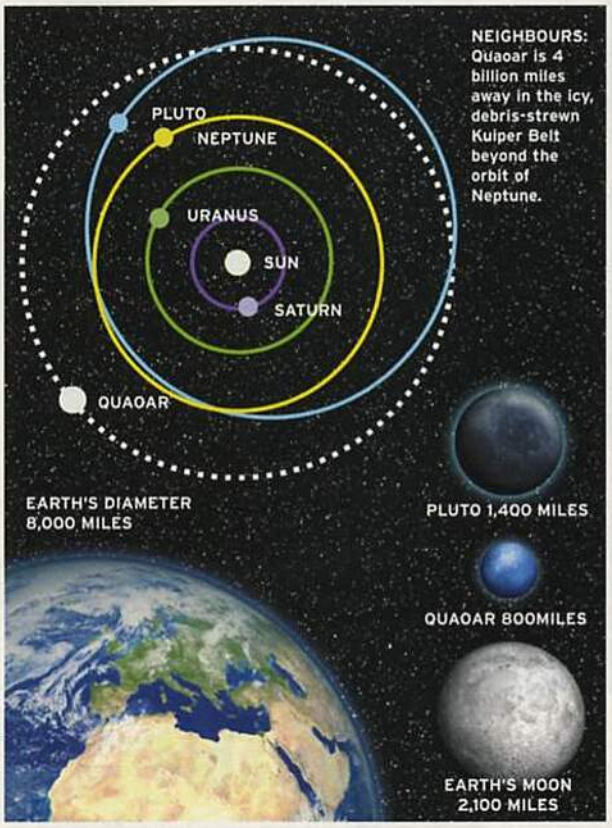
Von Hagens, wearing his trademark fedora and standing beneath a large reproduction of Rembrandt's *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr Nicholas Tulp*, took a hacksaw to his subject's skull and removed lungs, liver, spleen and other organs, which were neatly displayed and, in some cases, passed round the audience for closer inspection.

Since first hitting the headlines in his native Germany, von Hagens has been anything but media-shy, and after the media circus that has already surrounded his 'Body Worlds' exhibition, the idea of staging a public autopsy was clearly going to be a controversial (and highly publicised) one. Neither von Hagens nor his chosen venue were licensed under the Anatomy Act and the Professor was threatened with "criminal penalties" in a letter from Dr Jeremy Metters, HM Inspector of Anatomy. In the event, and despite the presence of two Scotland Yard detectives, von Hagens simply went ahead with the illegal dissection, accusing the British medical profession of exclusivity and secrecy over medical practices and citing "a huge demand among the public" and his own desire to "educate" rather than shock as justification to proceed with the event. Despite its apparent illegality, and the many accusations of sensationalism, voyeurism and exploitation levelled at both von Hagens and Channel 4, it seems that no charges are likely to be brought. We can only wonder what the man some have likened to Drs Frankenstein and Mengele will do for an encore.

Evening Standard, 13 Nov; D. Telegraph, 14+20+21 Nov; Guardian, 21+22 Nov; Int. Herald Tribune, 23 Nov2002.

BEYOND NEPTUNE

New celestial body discovered and the cloud bugs of Venus



ALEXANDER TOMLINSON

ASTRONOMERS HAVE DISCOVERED A frozen celestial body beyond Pluto that measures 800 miles (1,290km) in diameter – the biggest find in the solar system since Clyde Tombaugh spotted Pluto itself in 1930. The spherical body is half the size of Pluto and about a tenth that of Earth, and orbits the Sun once every 288 years. "It's about the size of all the asteroids put together," said Dr Michael Brown, an astronomer at the California Institute of Technology, Caltech, in Pasadena. Dr Brown and Dr Chadwick Trujillo made the discovery in images taken at the Palomar Observatory on 4 June, and announced their find on 7 October.

The object, 2002 LM60, has been named Quaoar (pronounced kwah-o-wahr), after the creation force of the Tongva tribe, the original inhabitants of the Los Angeles basin, where the Caltech campus is located. Archival research showed Quaoar had been captured on film as long ago as 1982, but no one noticed it.

Quaoar is about four billion miles (6.4 billion km) from Earth and is usually found beyond the eccentric orbit of Pluto in the Kuiper Belt, the fossil remnants of the swirling disc of debris that coalesced to form the solar system roughly five billion years ago. This is the region where comets originate. Astronomers have identified several hundred Kuiper Belt objects since the first was discovered in 1992, with Quaoar easily the largest so far. The next largest have diameters of about 560 miles (900km).

The case for Pluto as a planet weakens as larger Kuiper belt objects (KBOs) turn up. Pluto lies within the Kuiper belt and is considered by many merely the largest KBO, and not a planet in its own right. "If Pluto were discovered today," said Dr Brown, "no one would even consider calling it a planet". *[AP] New Scientist, 7 Oct; D.Telegraph, Int. Herald Tribune, Times, 8 Oct; Nature, 10 Oct 2002.*

VENUS IS USUALLY REGARDED as one of the least likely places in the solar system to find life. Enveloped in clouds of acid, the surface of the planet is about 460°C (860°F) and the atmospheric pressure is 10 times greater than Earth's. However, the presence of microbes could neatly explain several mysterious observations, according to Dr Dirk Schulze-Makuch from the University of Texas at El Paso.

At an altitude of 50km (30 miles), the atmospheric temperature is about 70°C (158°F), with a pressure similar to that at sea level on Earth – conditions relatively hospitable to life. This region also has the highest concentration of water droplets in the Venusian atmosphere. Solar radiation and lightning should produce large quantities of carbon monoxide, but instead it is scarce, as if something is removing it. Hydrogen sulphide and sulphur dioxide are also present. These two gases react with each other, and so are never normally found together unless something is producing them.

Odder still is the presence of carbonyl sulphide, so difficult to produce inorganically that it is sometimes considered an unambiguous indicator of biological activity. Schulze-Makuch thinks that bugs living in the Venusian clouds could be combining sulphur dioxide with carbon monoxide and possibly hydrogen to produce either hydrogen sulphide or carbonyl sulphide in a metabolism similar to that of some early Earth bugs. He suggests the bugs could be using ultraviolet light from the Sun as an energy source. If they are absorbing UV, that would explain the presence of mysterious dark patches on ultraviolet images of the planet.

André Brack from the Centre for Molecular Biophysics in Orléans, France, is sceptical. "For life, you need a volume of water, not just tiny droplets," he said. But Schulze-Makuch points out there is chemical evidence that Venus was once cooler and had oceans. "Life could have started there and retreated to stable niches once the runaway greenhouse effect began," he says.

Meanwhile, data from the Galileo space probe's journey to Jupiter suggests there is an ocean on the planet's moon, Europa, which has Earth-like properties. There are cracks in the moon's icy crust that would allow gases and heat to reach water beneath. The sea is not unlike the Arctic Ocean, which is exposed to air and heat by the cracking and melting of ice. *New Scientist, D.Telegraph, 26 Sept; The Week, 5 Oct 2002.*

EXTRA EXTRA

HEADLINES FROM NEWSPAPERS AROUND THE WORLD

ELF READIES HERSELF FOR GIANT CONTROVERSY
North Bay (Ontario) Nugget, 13 Dec 2001

GIFTS FOR YOUNG ALIENS
Sunday Mail (Australia), 23 Dec 2001.

DUCKS STAKE A CLAIM IF HURRICANES FIZZLE
Int. Herald Tribune, 3 Jan 2002.

MAN COMES BACK FROM THE DEAD AFTER BANKING MISTAKE
(Toronto) National Post, 3 Jan 2002.

JUDGE RULES IN FAVOUR OF FISH
Lewiston (ME) Sun Journal, 5 Jan 2002.

BUSH BLAZE FIREMEN ARE SAVED BY ELVIS
D.Express, 5 Jan 2002.

SAINTS, DEVILS RENEW RIVALRY
Lewiston (ME) Sun Journal, 12 Jan 2002.

BRIGHT KIDS TO BE STRETCHED
Manchester Metro, 18 Jan 2002.

MERMAID REVEALS DANGEROUS LORRIES
Bournemouth Daily Echo, 21 Jan 2002.

CHILD SNIFFING EXPOSED
Adelaide Advertiser, 22 Jan 2002.

FOX GETS PANTHERS' JOB
Minneapolis Star Tribune, 26 Jan 2002. [

EGG BUYS FRENCH INTERNET BANK
BBC News, 29 Jan 2002

LAMBS SLAUGHTER BRAVE ROYALS
Stoke-on-Trent Evening Sentinel, — 2002.

DOG OWNERS WARNED AFTER SHEEP ATTACKS
Carmarthen Journal, 30 Jan 2002.

NASTY FLY MAY RETURN TO PARK
Stoke-on-Trent Evening Sentinel, — Feb 2002.

PARENTS DEMAND RIGHT TO SMACK
Scotsman, —Feb 2001.

WOMEN FACE AUKS
Christchurch (NZ) Star, 1 Feb 2002.

SIDELINES

MAGIC DRAGON: Christian Vilchez, 16, Jorge Vela, 19, and Edy Frank Castillo, 19, who live in the Peruvian town of Tarapoto, are fans of the Japanese TV cartoon show "Dragon Ball Z' and never miss an episode. However, their parents say that, since watching it at the beginning of November, the teenagers have gone mute, had convulsions and lost their memories. Doctors have yet to come up with an explanation. ***Bournemouth Eve. Echo, 6 Nov 2002.***

CAN'T CATCH ME: A man strode into a Teheran, Iran, bank in early November and began to help himself to wads of banknotes, according to the *Jam-e-Jam* newspaper. He was overpowered before police were called. In court, he said that he had paid a Muslim holy man £400 to make him invisible so that he could get rich. *[AFP] 8 Nov 2002.*

PEEPING EMU: An hysterical woman rang police to report that a bare-chested man with two big white dots tattooed on his forehead had stared through her window in Hamburg. Officers believe it was an emu that had escaped from a zoo twice in two weeks, but were taking no chances. "We're looking for a naked man with huge eyes - or an emu," said a spokesman. ***[R] 24 Aug 2002.***

SPACE ACE: A lifesize (10ft/3m) tall ceramic green monster has been erected in Flatwoods, West Virginia, to mark the 50th anniversary of a famous UFO sighting. On 12 September 1952, a burning object fell from the sky near Elk River. Later, a woman and her two sons claimed a craft landed near the local school, followed by a large red-faced creature dressed in green with a head that resembled the ace of spades. *NY Post, 13 Sept 2002.*

SPECTACLE DENIED: Joan Hinchcliffe's children were excited by a sign at the zoo saying "Monster Man Eating Shark". But though they watched the shark for some time, the monster man never turned up. ***Feedback (New Scientist), 7 Sept 2002.***

HERE BE DRAGONS

Maori dragon stages a road protest and Chinese lake monster resurfaces

CHRIS BUTLER

DRAGON HALTS HIGHWAY

Work on a road scheme on New Zealand's North Island was halted on 1 November after a Maori tribe warned it could upset a fearsome serpent-like *taniwha* spirit called Karu Tahi ("One-eyed"). Members of the Ngati Naho tribe told the highway agency Transit New Zealand that the planned route of the Waikato expressway traversed a swamp near Meremere where Karu Tahi lived. *Taniwha* are believed to act as guardians for rivers and landmarks. In Maori legend a different *taniwha* guards each bend of the river.

Brenda Maxwell, a Maori spokeswoman, said her people believe that the inordinate number of lives lost on the highway in often inexplicable head-on crashes were caused by the local *taniwha*.

She wanted the new road to be built away from the swamp and across high ground.

An agreement was reached on 7 November to continue construction south of the disputed area, but further negotiations were promised. There were two other *taniwha*, Waiwai and Te Iaroa, which could be disturbed by the project. Work building the 7.5 mile (12km) stretch of four-lane highway had only just restarted after it was halted in September when sinking earthworks blew the $56 million construction budget. *D.Telegraph, 6 Nov; Ananova, 4 Nov; New Zealand Herald, 8+9 Nov 2002.*

Inexplicable head-on crashes were caused by the local *taniwha*

CHINESE LAKE MONSTER

The Monster of Tianchi Lake in China's Jilin province, bordering North Korea, was back in the news last July after several reported sightings. The 9.8sq km (3.8 sq mile) Tianchi Lake in the Changbai Mountains is 373 metres (1,224ft) deep, making it China's deepest volcanic lake. Meng Fanying, director of a local tourist bureau, said the black monster, with a horse-like head, was 10 metres (33ft) from the bank during the most recent sighting, and jumped out of the water from time to time "like a seal". It was seen for 10 minutes by about 200 sightseers.

Although no one really got a clear look at it, local photographer Xue Junlin claimed that it looked just like the Tianchi Lake monster on display at the Changbai Mountain Natural History Museum. He and another local man, Liu Bo, had seen the monster previously, and the legend is more than a century old.

Scientists are sceptical, not least because of volcanic eruptions as recently as 300 years ago would make life extremely hazardous for any animal making the lake its home.

There are other alleged lake monsters in China, such as the 10-metre (33ft) long salmon in Hanas Lake, north-western Xinjiang province, that attack both people and cattle. *China Daily, ABC News (Australia), 31 July 2002.*

WESTERN DAILY PRESS/PAUL STALLARD

DIVE-BOMB SWAN : The angry swan menaces canoeists on the Kennet and Avon Canal in Wiltshire.

WINGED AVENGERS

Swans dive-bomb boaters and delinquent owls prey on aircraft and cattle

RIVER RAGE

Canoeists taking part in the Devizes to Westminster Canoe Race on 29 March were attacked by an irate swan near the Devizes Wharf on the Kennet and Avon Canal in Wiltshire. The bird's mate was nesting on the bank nearby, and it took a series of vicious pecks at scores of canoes and sometimes dive-bombed them. *Western Daily Press, 30 Mar 2002.*

OWL OFFENSIVE

Crop dusting aircraft in the Pozarevac region of north-eastern Serbia – specifically round the town of Veliki Popovac in the Mlava River valley – have been attacked by enormous owls during daylight hours. The birds have expelled swallows from the region, regarded by farmers as a bad omen. The local people believe that anyone who kills a swallow will be punished with the death of their mother, daughter, or a close relative. The arrival of the owls is seen as punishment for the neglect of abandoned and overgrown churches.

According to the *Glas* newspaper, the owls are also attacking cattle in the afternoon, prompting farmers to bring their herds in before sundown. A local vet speculated that the owls' aggression is caused by the destruction of the ozone layer leading to an increase in solar radiation; others blame fine dust blown in from radioactive mineral heaps in Romania. Radiation from this dust, they suggest, has caused genetic changes in the owl population, making them perceive aircraft as prey to be attacked. *Notimex (La Agencia Mexicana de Notícias), 19 July 2002.*

SAVED BY DOLPHINS

Grant Dickson, 36, and his deckhand mate, Benjamin Healy, 19, scrambled on to a damaged dinghy as their prawn trawler *Eastern Leader* sank east of Queensland on 19 July after the trawl line snagged on seaweed near Dunk Island. Skipper Dale Robert Speck, 43, was lost, believed drowned. After a few hours, Mr Healy tried to swim to safety, but he too was believed drowned. Mr Dickson, recovering in hospital after his ordeal, said about 30 sharks had followed the trawler during the night before it sank in rough seas. One continually circled as he clung to the partly submerged dinghy for 40 hours.

"I was worried I was bleeding too much and the blood would attract the shark and that would be it. But some dolphins came to my rescue and chased away the shark. They saved my life." His ordeal lasted several more hours before he was rescued by the cruise ship *MV Reef Endeavour* on 18 July after drifting 40 nautical miles. Searchers located debris from the trawler but failed to find any trace of the missing men. *[AP] 23 July 2002.*

GIFT HORSE: After Jacqueline Boanson's debit card was stolen, a mystery £291.40 appeared in her bank account. Andrew Cameron had stolen the card from his victim's post and used it to place two £50 bets on horses. When the horses romped home, Ladbrokes paid the winnings into Ms Boanson's account. The thief was placed on 12 months' probation in Cheltenham. *Gloucestershire Times, 7 Aug 2002.*

LUNATIC ASYLUM BID: Factory worker Constantin Simion, 52, from Campineanca in Romania, who spent most of his life under Ceausescu's dictatorship, has asked for asylum in Iraq. "If Iraq says no, I'll try my luck with Libya or Cuba, anything that is a totalitarian regime," he said. "I'm sick of democracy." *Sunday Metro, 9 Oct; Times, 13 Oct 2002.*

HOCUS-POCUS: To check for witchcraft, grooms have been taking their brides to Djundjerski Castle in Kulpin, Serbia, for an ancient broom test. The women are weighed and then weighed again sitting on a broom. If they weigh more the second time, they are not being supported by the broom, and are "certainly not a witch". A certificate is issued. Historians from Novi Sad University, who revived the ritual, were stunned by how many people were worried about the issue. *Irish Examiner, 18 Oct 2002.*

DESPAIR PAYS: A woman who tried to kill herself by lying in front of a subway train won nearly £10 million in damages. The New York Supreme Court ruled that the train should have stopped. Drivers had been told to slow to 10mph (16km/h) after the woman was spotted; but a train travelling slightly faster hit her, fracturing her skull. *D.Mail, 26 June 2002.*

JIG'S UP: Shortly after last Christmas, Constable Paul Sorbain visited David Baldwin, 58, of Flemington, Victoria, about damage to the latter's car. The one-legged Baldwin then began stalking the young Australian policeman, bombarding him with loud Irish music on his car tape recorder. He was arrested on 13 January and given a suspended jail term of three months. *Melbourne Herald Sun, 9 Aug 2002.*

WHAT A WAG! A part-time cab driver aged 47 tried to gatecrash a September 11 memorial service at the US embassy in Singapore disguised as President Saddam Hussein. The man, of Indian ethnicity, was sent to a mental institution for observation. *Queensland Times, 13 Sept 2002.*

FORCED DEPOSIT: A 33-year-old man in Kraaifontein, South Africa, was accosted by a passerby who lured him to his house with an offer of food. Once there, the Good Samaritan locked the door and told the man to have sex with his wife. The victim was punched when he refused. He was then partially stripped and forced to ejaculate into a jar. The suspect collected his victim's sperm and sealed it in the jar before letting him go. Police were trying to trace the suspect. *Ananova, 6 Aug 2002.*

PRAYER HAZARD: Believing she had been touched by God, Loraine Daly, 40, fell backwards at a New Age church service in the Sydney suburb of Waterloo in August 1996 - but she was not caught and none of the 'catchers' attended to her after she hit the carpeted concrete floor. She sued Sydney Christian Life Centre Ltd for A$750k for injuries suffered in the fall, including brain damage, neck strain, shock and dizziness. She lost on 18 October. *Melbourne Age, 27 Sept; Canberra Times, 19 Oct 2002.*

LINE OF SIGHT: Peter Davies, 50, of East Boldon, South Tyneside, had laser surgery to correct his shortsightedness. A few weeks later, the golf enthusiast bagged two holes-in-one at his club in Whitburn within three days. He hit his first ace in only the second round of golf after the operation. *Sun, 6 July 2002.*

TOLD YOU: The chef at a Zurich hotel, who lost a finger in a meat-slicer mishap, submitted a claim to his insurance company. It suspected negligence, and sent an inspector to check the machine. When he turned it on, he too lost a finger. Claim approved. *Guardian, 19 June 2002.*

PHANTOM ODDITIES

Moose on the loose, unidentified submarine objects and air traffic ghosts

GHOSTLY MOOSE

In August, a psychic from Rangeley, Maine, known only as Kaimora, invited a friend who was performing locally in a musical show to come for a visit. The friend brought along three friends. They said they had never seen a moose, so Kaimora took them to Height of Land, on Route 17 south of Oquossoc. They put new film in their cameras and watched the sun set. They didn't see a moose, even after Kaimora made three moose calls. On their way home, about five miles (8km) down Route 17, they came upon a gigantic moose by the side of the road and pulled over. The moose had a rack about 8ft (2.4m) wide, and was behind a guard rail munching grass. Everyone took photographs with the group standing near the moose.

About 35 photographs in all were taken. However, when they were developed, all the people were in the photos, but there was no sign of the moose. Kaimora's account was backed up by Janis Sommers from Florida, who was one of the other people present. Kaimora speculated that they had encountered a ghost moose. When an animal is killed quickly, she said, its soul gets trapped on Earth. This year, hunters killed 91 moose in the Rangeley region. *Lewiston (ME) Sun Journal, 31 Oct 2002.*

ALEX TOMLINSON

BAFFIN ISLAND BAFFLEMENT

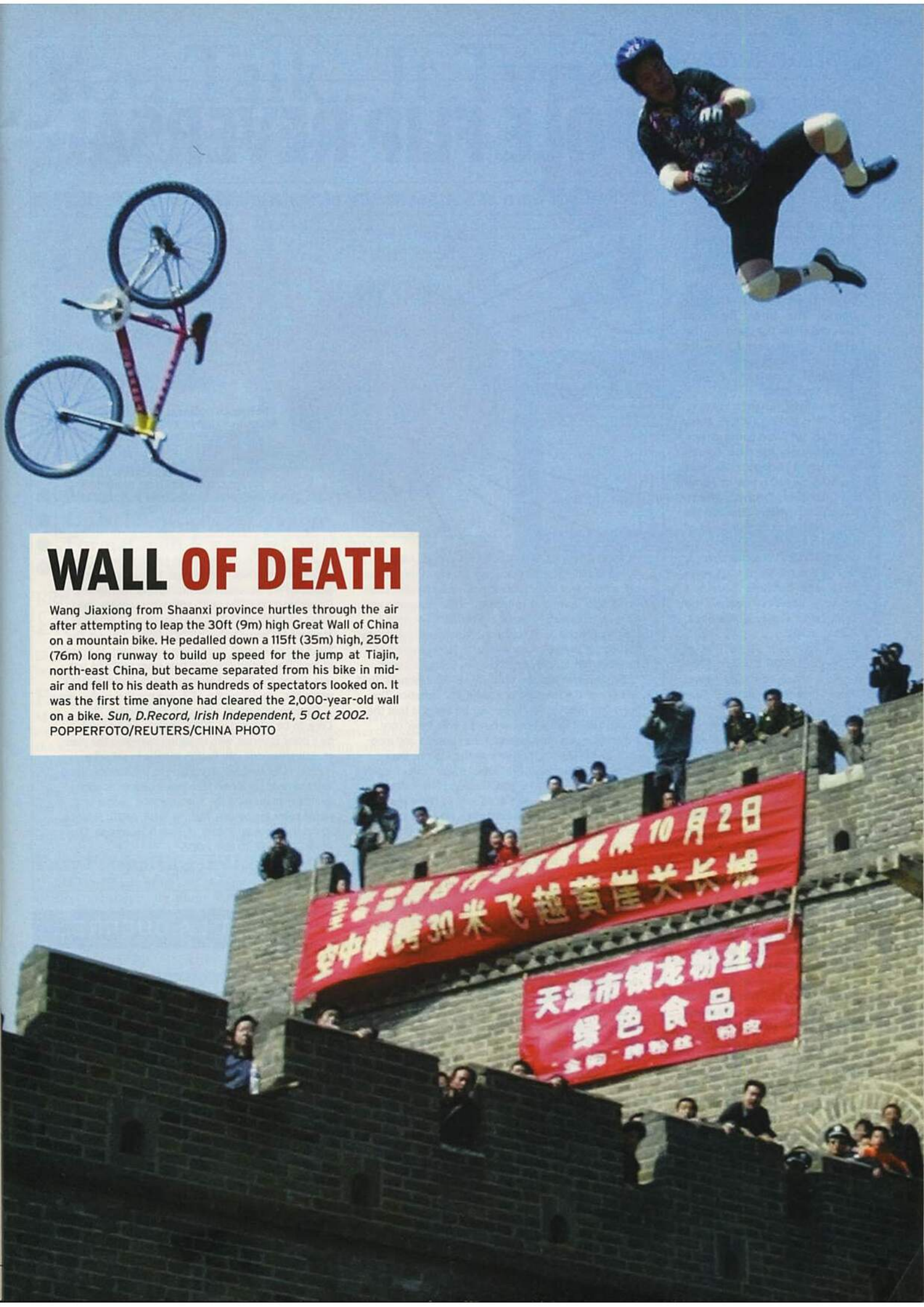
Over the last two years, there have been many sightings of unusual objects moving along or just below the surface of the water in Canada's Arctic territories. Most of the sightings took place in August and September 2001 near Pond Inlet on Baffin Island, where, on 11 occasions, Inuit hunters and members of the Canadian Rangers reported seeing large waves and strange objects under the water. Mysterious footprints were also found along the water's edge near where the objects were sighted. Marine animals had largely disappeared from the area. Another object was seen by an RCMP officer in August 1999 and later by a group of hunters in Cumberland Sound off Baffin Island. Again, there was a noticeable lack of marine animals in the area at the time.

Col Pierre Leblanc, a retired commander of Canadian Forces Northern Area, suspects incursion by foreign submarines, intent on looting diamonds and fresh water; but Navy Commander Mike Considine said there was no evidence that foreign boats were operating in the area. Two Canadian Navy submariners sent to investigate the 2001 sightings suggested that strong currents or wind could have caused the unusual waves reported by the Inuit (as if the native observers couldn't tell the difference). *FT* is reminded of the long-running mystery of unidentified submarine objects in Swedish coastal waters. *[CP] Victoria (BC) Times-Colonist, 19 Aug 2002.*

GHOST JETS SCARE

Several times since June, "ghost" aircraft have appeared on air traffic computer screens at the new national control centre at Swanwick, Hampshire. Garbled radar data from the North Sea sector, which largely handles flights between Britain and Scandinavia, have produced false symbols of what seem to be aircraft following genuine aircraft, with the same altitude, speed and heading data.

More alarmingly, sometimes the data block jumps from one symbol to the other, creating confusion as to which is the real aircraft. Controllers have been told to maintain an extra four-mile (6km) spacing between aircraft if the phenomenon occurs. The glitch is the latest of a series encountered at the £623 million control centre since it opened in January. National Air Traffic Services (NATS) say the "ghost" problem never occurred at their old centre in West Drayton, west London, but insist that safety is not being compromised. *Edinburgh Eve. News, 10 Oct; D.Telegraph, D.Mirror, Metro, 11 Oct 2002.*



WALL OF DEATH

Wang Jiaxiong from Shaanxi province hurtles through the air after attempting to leap the 30ft (9m) high Great Wall of China on a mountain bike. He pedalled down a 115ft (35m) high, 250ft (76m) long runway to build up speed for the jump at Tiajin, north-east China, but became separated from his bike in mid-air and fell to his death as hundreds of spectators looked on. It was the first time anyone had cleared the 2,000-year-old wall on a bike. *Sun, D.Record, Irish Independent, 5 Oct 2002.*
POPPERFOTO/REUTERS/CHINA PHOTO

ORCHID MYSTERY: Rare orchids called Irish Ladies Tresses have been found growing in marshland on the Hebridean island of Tiree. The flowers are native to northwest Greenland or northern North America. This is the first time they have been found growing wild in Scotland. They might have been transported by a Greenland Whitefront Goose. The birds fly from Greenland to Scotland in the winter, and one might have deposited an orchid seed in its droppings. *Scotland on Sunday, 1 Sept 2002.*

FOURTH TIME LUCKY: Mark Stenton survived being struck by lightning for the fourth time on 3 August. He was working on his truck at home in Chatham County, North Carolina, when the strike knocked him out. The soles of his shoes burned off and his watch melted. "I either draw it or I've got the worst luck anybody can possible have – I haven't decided which," he said. ***Local 6 News, Ananova, 7 Aug 2002.***

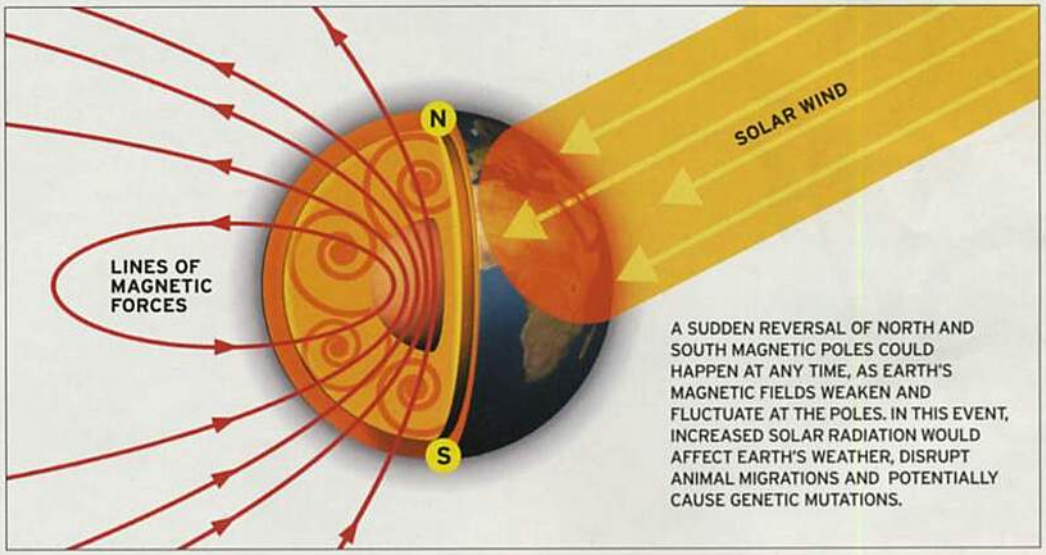
STONES FROM BONES: LifeGem, a small company based near Chicago, is offering blue diamonds made from the cremated remains of people and pets. Clients can literally have loved ones wrapped around their fingers. Carbon from one body can yield up to 50 stones of varying sizes. Prices start at $4,000 for a quarter-carat gem, with a minimum order of two. *www.lifegem.com [AP] 23 Aug; Economist, 24 Aug 2002.*

HORN OF PLENTY: A policeman patrolling the Regent's Canal towpath in Camden, north London, made an unexpected drugs bust when he playfully squeezed the horn on the bike of a man to whom he was chatting and a bag of cannabis flew out. ***Camden New Journal, 18 July 2002.***

ARCTIC SHOOT-OUT: Three polar bears that broke into at least 10 holiday cabins on the island of Colesbukta, near Spitsbergen, smashed furniture and ate the food were shot dead by Norwegian police in a grim variant of the Goldilocks tale. *Gold Coast (Queensland) Bulletin, 24 July 2002.*

POLE FLIP REVERSAL

Scientists warn of the possibility of the world turned upside down



ALEX TOMLINSON

A SUDDEN REVERSAL OF NORTH AND SOUTH MAGNETIC POLES COULD HAPPEN AT ANY TIME, AS EARTH'S MAGNETIC FIELDS WEAKEN AND FLUCTUATE AT THE POLES. IN THIS EVENT, INCREASED SOLAR RADIATION WOULD AFFECT EARTH'S WEATHER, DISRUPT ANIMAL MIGRATIONS AND POTENTIALLY CAUSE GENETIC MUTATIONS.

IN 1600 SIR WILLIAM GILBERT, PHYSICIAN TO Queen Elizabeth I, suggested that the Earth was a magnet; subsequent observations of compass needles pointing straight down at the magnetic poles showed he was right, up to a point. However, the planet is not a solid magnet. For one thing, its magnetic poles are constantly drifting . At present, magnetic north is heading out of Canadian territory at about 10 miles (16km) per year.

Einstein said that the origin of Earth's magnetic field was one of the three great mysteries of physics. The prevailing hypothesis for the last 50 years is that the outer shell of molten iron around a solid inner core behaves like a dynamo generating currents and magnetic fields. The study of lava on the Atlantic floor shows that the poles have flipped many times, heralded by a weakening of the magnetic field. "Reversals happen every 250,000 years or so, and as there has not been one for almost a million years, we are due one soon," according to Dr Alan Thomson of the British Geological Survey in Edinburgh. Magnetism trapped in ancient pottery shows that over the past 4,000 years the magnetic field has weakened by more than 50 per cent – five per cent in the last century alone.

Dr Gauthier Hulot of the Paris Geophysical Institute and colleagues at the Danish Space Research Institute in Copenhagen have recently discovered the field seems to be disappearing most alarmingly near the poles, suggesting an imminent pole flip. Using satellite measurements over 20 years, they plotted the currents of molten iron deep underground and spotted huge whorls near the poles. Hulot believes these vortices rotate in a direction that reinforces a reverse magnetic field, the first steps toward a new polarity. Computer simulation studies back up Hulot's hypothesis, according to a *Scientific American* report this November. However, it is not known whether a pole reversal would last a few weeks or thousands of years; and the trend towards pole-flip could reverse itself at any time.

The effects of a temporary disappearance of the magnetic field prior to a reversal could be catastrophic. The field stretches several hundred miles into space and protects us from cosmic rays by focusing them towards the poles – hence the Northern and Southern Lights. Powerful radiation bursts would heat up the upper atmosphere, triggering climatic disruption. Navigation and communication satellites would be destroyed and migrating animals left unable to navigate. Dr Paul Murdin of the Institute of Astronomy, Cambridge, said: "On Mars, when its magnetic field failed permanently billions of years ago, it led to its atmosphere being boiled off." Curiously, though, the fossil record doesn't show mass extinctions or bursts of evolution during previous pole reversals. The last was during the time of *Homo erectus*, about 780,000 years ago.

Paramount's latest science fiction thriller, *The Core*, to be released in 2003, depicts a world beset by a polar reversal, with radiation sweeping the planet. Scientists drill into Earth's mantle to set off a nuclear blast that will (according to the scriptwriters) halt the reversal. Given that temperatures at such depths rival those of the Sun's surface, such a task would seem impossible. *Nature, v416, p620; Science, 10 April; Guardian, 11 April, 4 July; D.Telegraph, 17 April; Observer, 10 Nov 2002.*

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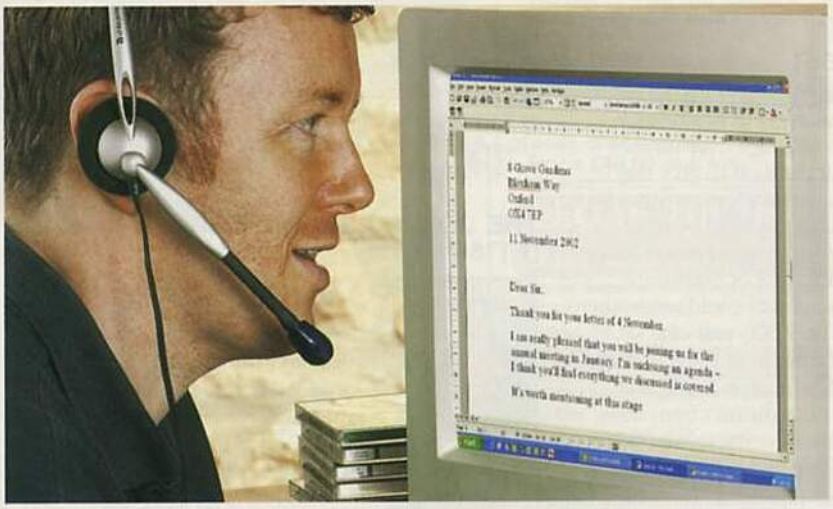

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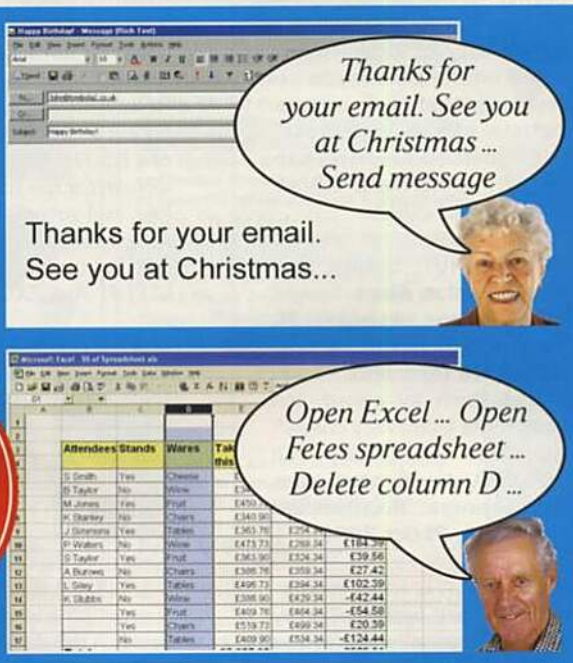
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RETURN TO SENDER: Alexi Hall, 13, from Saltwood, near Folkestone in Kent, threw a message in a bottle into the Caribbean while on a cruise in the West Indies, 5,000 miles (8,000km) from England. The bottle was picked up a year later by a woman in Lydd, less than 10 miles (16km) from Alexi's home. *Independent, 26 July 2002.*

BAD DOG! Hojatoleslam Hasani, a conservative imam, denounced the "moral depravity" of dog ownership in a sermon in the northwestern Iranian city of Urumieh. He called on the judiciary to arrest dogs and their owners. Despite official disapproval, dog ownership has risen, particularly in northern Tehran. *[AFP] 13 Oct 2002.*

BUTTON NUT: Belgian zookeeper Victor Bleus bought 60m buttons, weighing 30 tons, at a Hamburg auction. He will sell them once he has sorted them by colour and size. "I got them very cheap," he said. "If I can sell 500,000, I will have done good business." *Bournemouth Daily Echo, 21 Oct 2002.*

BURIED ALIVE: A five-month-old baby girl, buried alive by superstitious villagers in the Vietnamese province of Kon Tum, was saved by a border guard. The *Tin Tuc Buoi Chieu* newspaper said the child's mother, a member of the ethnic Gia Rai community, was buried with the infant in the same coffin in the hope that the dead woman could continue to suckle her baby. *[AFP] 30 Aug 1997.*

DEATH LEAP: A giraffe suspected of trampling to death American priest James Gregory (or Karaffa), 50, in a Kenyan game sanctuary was tranquillised to examine its hooves. It staggered and fell to its death over a precipice. *D.Telegraph, 27 June [AFP] Metro, 28 June 2002.*

FIERY OFFERING: A burglar ignored a woman's valuables, but piled her underwear on the cooker and burnt them. Marie Smith, 34, from Manton, Nottinghamshire, said the fire gutted her kitchen while she was on holiday with her husband. *Sunday Telegraph, 24 Mar 2002.*

FORTEAN FOLLOW-UPS

In which we revisit some of the stories reported in the pages of *Fortean Times*

KENNEWICK MAN [FT95:28-30, 128:66]

On 30 August, more than six years after the discovery of Kennewick Man, a federal judge overturned a government decision to give the bones to American Indian tribes for reburial under the 1990 Native American Grave Preservation and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA). US magistrate John Jelderks ruled that scientists could retain the bones for further study. The 9,300-year-old remains were found on the banks of the Columbia River near Kennewick, Washington State, and appear to show characteristics distinct from those of a Native American. Dana Perino, spokeswoman for the Justice Department in Washington DC, said government attorneys would have to review the ruling before they could comment. The case has cost taxpayers an estimated $3 million. *[AP] 31 Aug 2002.*

MARREE MAN MYSTERY [FT115:6]

An eccentric South Australian artist, who lived in Alice Springs for 30 years, may have taken one of Australia's mysteries to the grave. Bardius Goldberg, who died in Hahndorf in July aged 61, is suspected of creating the Marree Man, a giant drawing of a naked Aboriginal hunter, 2.5 miles (4km) tall and 17 miles (27km) in circumference, which appeared south of Lake Eyre in the South Australian desert in July 1998.

"Bardius had a good understanding of global satellite technology, he had access to earthmoving equipment and there were suspicions he was involved from the start, but no one could prove anything," said his friend Reg Harris. "A bloke who apparently ran an air charter business in the area gave Bardius $10,000 around the time the Marree Man was discovered. Bardius said he was under instructions not to discuss why he was paid. If anyone was mad enough, talented enough and cheeky enough to do it, it was Bardius." *Adelaide Advertiser, 24 Aug 2002.*

LIONESS ADOPTS FIFTH ORYX [FT158:26]

Kamuniak, the dysfunctional lioness in Kenya's Samburu national park, adopted a fifth baby oryx, an aberration of nature that has baffled wildlife experts. Kamuniak, whose name means "blessed one" in the local Samburu tongue, treats the antelopes as her own cubs, grooming and protecting them, while leaving their natural mothers in charge of feeding. A male lion ate the first, adopted last December, while Kamuniak slept; the one adopted in February was rescued by wardens; and the ones adopted in April and May were retrieved by their mothers.

The latest oryx, nicknamed Naisimari ("taken by force"), was adopted on 6 October, but died of hunger four days later. Many theories to explain Kamuniak's behaviour have been advanced: not having her own cubs, she is lonely; she is colour blind and short sighted, and thinks the calves are cubs; the oryx were too frail to flee, breaking the classic prey behaviour and confusing the hunter; or Kamuniak wants to be a vegetarian. *[R] Guardian, East African Standard, 8 Oct; [Sapa DPA] D.Mail, 12 Oct; The Week, 19 Oct 2002.*

THE JERUSALEM OSSUARY [FT166:19]

The ossuary, allegedly looted from the town of Silwan below the southern wall of the Old City of Jerusalem and bought from a dealer by Oded Golan in the mid 1970s, was sent to the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, Canada, but was damaged in transit. When it arrived on 31 October, there were several new cracks, one of which ran through the inscription "James son of Joseph brother of Jesus" (or, more accurately, "Jacob son of Joseph brother of Joshua"). The controversial relic was to be on display until the end of the year.

According to the palæographer Rochelle I Altman, who examined the ossuary, the first part of the inscription, "Jacob son of Joseph" is in competent excised inscriptional cursive and is genuine, while the second part "…brother of Joshua", is in poorly executed commercial sans-wedge cursive and was obviously added later by someone unfamiliar with Aramaic or the calligraphic style. To extend the original excised inscription, the frame has been removed. Altman was happy to accept the estimated date of the ossuary, AD 63. *Biblical Archaeology Review, 29 Oct; [R] 2 Nov; Time, 4 Nov 2002.*

A report in Russia's *Pravda* (14 Nov 2002) shows how that once sober organ of the communist state now outdoes American supermarket tabloids. We are told that that the Ontario Royal Museum has offered almost $500,000 for the "coffin of Jesus Christ's brother", which was bought by "Peter Anrik" 15 years ago for $700. André "Lemer", professor of Biblical archæology, "stated that the coffin was made of a material that does not exist on planet Earth." A certain Dmitry Astrakhantsev, "the head of the Ufology and Anomaly Centre", said: "Observations and research show that aliens were involved in a lot of things that were happening during Biblical times." The angel Gabriel was an alien and the Star of Bethlehem was probably an alien spaceship. Aliens used material from their own planet to make the "coffin". *Pravda* adds: "One could suppose that the coffin plays the role of a radio beacon… but this is not really believable." No shit, Sherlock!

EMBALMED TRAMP [FT166:21]

On 11 November, Nigel Meadows, the coroner of Plymouth and South Devon, ruled that the embalmed body of Edwin MacKenzie, discovered in Robert Lenkiewicz's studio following his death in August, was the property of the Lenkiewicz Foundation, the charity responsible for the 60-year-old artist's works. The body may go on display alongside some of Lenkiewicz's paintings. *D.Telegraph, 12 Nov 2002.*

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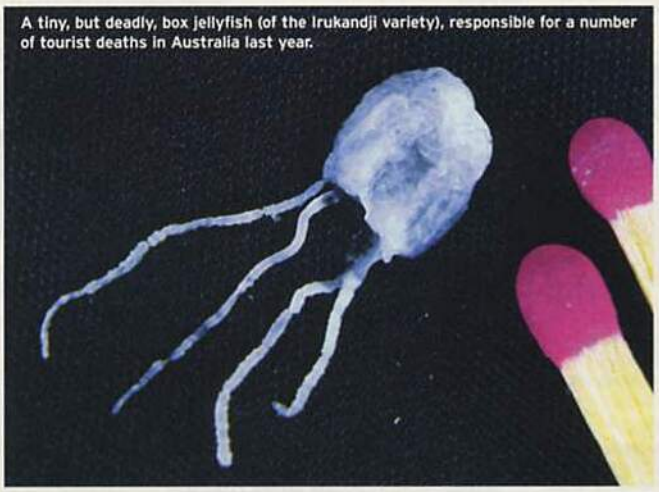
FT FEB 03

KARL SHUKER'S ALIEN ZOO

This month, Dr Karl Shuker is unconvnced by the proposed identity of India's mysterious, face-scratching muhnochwa and greets a number of new arrivals, including the fearsome gladiators, the Bavarian super-sponge and... Sooty.



A tiny, but deadly, box jellyfish (of the Irukandji variety), responsible for a number of tourist deaths in Australia last year.

AP PHOTO/BRIAN CASSEY

A STING IN THE TALE?

In mid-October 2002, a box jellyfish (cubomedusan) was found at The Strand in Townsville, Queensland, Australia, that has caused even more than the usual stir caused whenever one of these highly venomous sea creatures turns up. Beaches are often closed and stinger nets set out if a quantity of box jellies appear, but what makes this particular (dead) specimen so startling is that it does not seem to match any known cubomedusan species anywhere in the world. According to cubomedusan expert Dr Jamie Seymour at James Cook University's School of Tropical Biology, its nematocysts (stinging cells) are different in shape, its tentacles are shorter, its general shape and size are different too, and it doesn't have as many dots on its body. Clearly, therefore, as noted by Dr Seymour, "this highlights the fact that we know so very little about stingers. We are really at the very, very beginning of a long journey".
http://townsvillebulletin.news.com.au/common/story_page/0,7034,5316713%255E14787,00.html 19 Oct 2002.

HOW NOW, BROWN OWL

Sadly, the sight of a ghostly white barn owl on the wing in Britain's countryside, seeking mice or other small prey, is not so common nowadays as it once was. But it is still a lot more so than the sight of a deep-brown barn owl – on the wing or otherwise – which is why Sooty (pictured right, with non-melanistic sister) is making such a sweep in the popularity stakes at the New Forest Owl Sanctuary in Ringwood, Hampshire, where he hatched in August 2002. An example of melanism (displaying an abnormal abundance of dark pigment), Sooty may well be the first melanistic barn owl to be born in Britain for a century, and the chances of him being born at all are 100,000 to one! *Daily Mail, 20 Nov 2002.*

BOURNEMOUTH NEWS

ITCHING FOR ANSWERS

One of the weirdest mystery beasts reported of late must surely be the muhnochwa, or scratch monster, of Lakhimour Kheri in India. Claimed to be a luminous aerial entity that severely scratches its human victims, leaving distinctive lacerations in their skin, for quite some time it eluded all attempts at capture. However, a supposed muhnochwa was finally caught in August 2002 and brought to Lucknow University for formal identification. Here, zoologist Prof KC Pandey later announced that it was a specimen of a rare, 3in (7.6cm)-long species of grasshopper, known scientifically (and aptly, as it turns out) as *Schizodactylus monstrosus* [*see* ***FT164:7***].

Its most noteworthy feature, in view of its alleged synonymity with the scratch monster, is the series of sharp spikes on its hind limbs. Yet although these may conceivably produce a slight mark on the skin if the insect is handled, they do not seem powerful enough to inflict the kind of wounds blamed upon the muhnochwa – which leaves the experts scratching their heads, and the monster's victims still scratching their wounds. *Times of India, 24 Aug 2002.*

IT'S SUPER SPONGE!

Unlike their maritime kin, freshwater sponges are typically small, rarely exceeding an inch or two in length. Until recently, the only major exception has been a 3ft/90cm-high species in Siberia's Lake Baikal, where it grows at a depth of around 120ft (36m). However, an unexpected rival has now been discovered in the Staffelsee, a freshwater lake in Upper Bavaria. Moreover, not only is this giant specimen 3ft tall too, but it is far more readily visible than its Siberian counterpart, having wrapped itself round the timber support of a ruined bridge – and it is still growing! Researchers hope to film their super-sized sponge soon.
www.iol.co.za/index.php?click_id=143&art_id=qw103347720040B265&set_id=1 1 Oct 2002.

ENTRY OF THE GLADIATORS

Those entomological mouthfuls known as the mantophasmatodeans – comprising the first new taxonomic order of insects to have been discovered by science since the grylloblattodeans or rock crawlers way back in 1914 – have finally received official recognition, by being formally described and named in the 24 May 2002 issue of the eminent American journal *Science*. Not only that, they have been given a much more readily remembered (and pronounced!) common name – the gladiators, on account of their fearsome appearance and the armour that covers them in their juvenile (nymph) stage. An entire website devoted to the gladiators can be accessed at:
http://www.mantophasmatodea.de

classicalcorner 35

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

BEND SINISTER

ARTTODAY

Alex Bowman [*FT161:54*] asks: "Does anyone know of left-handed kings and the consequences of their reigns as a result of their left-handedness? Is all of this twaddle?"

One place to look might be the magazine *Lefthander* (Topeka, Kansas).

I write with feeling on this one. At school in 1940s England, we were not allowed to write with the left hand. For me, a natural keghander, the consequence was calamitous: illegible in both hands. This makes me sympathise with left-handed ancient Greek infantrymen, their basic line-up – shield in left hand, sword in right – presuming individual dextrousness; cf. Victor Davis Hanson, *The Western Way of War* (Oxford, 1989, pp65-71), plus Fort's (*Books*, p1027) gruesome anecdote of right-handed African warriors.

D Wallechinsky/I & A Wallace, *Book of Lists I* (Bantam, NY, 1978, pp6-7) offer a select list of 30 famous left-handers, including one English king (George II), three American presidents (Ford, Garfield, Truman), and the Roman emperor Tiberius.

This last, a traditional baddie, wore his seal ring on a finger of his left hand which "was the more nimble and stronger, and its joints were so powerful that he could bore through a fresh sound apple with his finger, and break the head of a boy, or even a young man, with a flick" (Suetonius, *Life of Tiberius*, ch68 para1, ch73 para2).

Julius Caesar may have been left-handed, since he accepted a warning note handed to him on the Ides of March with that one, and also used it to draw down his robe when attacked (Suetonius, *Life of Julius*, ch81 para4, ch82 para2).

Riding through Rome in triumph after his Michael Jackson-like Victory Tour of Greece, Nero held his winner's crown aloft in his right hand (Suetonius, *Life of Nero*, ch25 para1).

Augustus was markedly weak in his left hip, thigh, and leg – presumably his hand too – and "sometimes found the forefinger of his right hand so weak when numb with cold that he could hardly write with it." (Suetonius, *Life of Augustus*, ch80).

In a famous story (Livy, *History*, bk2 ch12), Mucius Scaevola puts his right hand in the fire to demonstrate Roman grit. His name Scaevola connotes left-handedness. Were the Mucii a family of southpaws? Roman cognomina frequently derive from physical characteristics. Not so in Greek, though is it coincidence that Oedipus' dastardly father was called Laios (Mr Lefty)?

Writing on manual anatomy, Pliny (*Natural History*, bk11 ch98 para243) ignores the issue; elsewhere (bk35 ch7 para20), though, he exclaims "Turpilius [1st cent. AD] painted with his left hand, a thing recorded of no previous artist." There is only one allusion to cackhanders in Patristic Greek: Synesius, *Letters*, no4; cf. GWH Lampe, *Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford, 1961).

Religion, unsurprisingly, played a role in the good-bad cheiric dichotomies. Greek and Roman augury – a point often overlooked – differed: Hellenic epiphanies on the left were unlucky, Latin ones propitious, though there were individual and local divergencies, otherwise 'sinister' would not mean what it does in English.

In both early Christian literature and the Koran, the elect are inevitably arrayed to the right of God, the damned to his left. One Greek word for Left ('Euonumos') is used by Theodotus (*Eighth Commentary on Leviticus*, bk1 ch187) in the sense of Evil. A third-century AD heretic sect, the Novatians, were known as The Lefthanders.

For more on assymetry, including (Eyes Down, men!) why the left testicle hangs lower, see now Chris McManus, *Right Hand Left Hand* (Weidenfeld & Nicholson, London, 2002), who concludes, "The only recorded sinistral success in an essentially one-sided cold war was the introduction in the medical profession of Rectum for a little-regarded part of the human anatomy."

I sign off with the serviceman's traditional epistolary last line to his sweetheart: I write to you with my right hand, I think of you with my left.

TAKING THE MICKEY

Mediæval mouse or just a legendary weasel?

EURO PICS

WALT DISNEY FIRST SKETCHED MICKEY MOUSE IN 1928, BUT Austrian art historian Eduard Mahlknecht has spotted an uncannily similar rodent in a fresco dating from around 1300. Mahlknecht found the painting during restoration on the outside wall of the Community Church in the village of Malta, in Austria's Carinthia province. The 20in (50cm) mediæval Mickey kneels among a group of animals and mythical beasts surrounding St Christopher, who is depicted standing in a river. The patron saint of travellers was often portrayed surrounded by animals.

Mahlknecht believes the similarity to Mickey is coincidental. He is not even certain the creature is a mouse at all. "It could just as well be a painting of the weasel legend," he said. According to legend, the weasel was fertilised through its mouth and gave birth through its ears, which may be why the ears of the fresco creature are so large. However, the local tourist bureau speculated the village could become a shrine for Mickey fans around the world. *Ananova, D.Telegraph, 14 Nov; Melbourne Age, 15 Nov 2002.*

WWW.RENSE.COM

WAFFLE ROCK

This boulder can be seen at Jennings Randolph Lake in Mineral County, West Virginia. Geologists say it comes from the Conemaugh geological series deposited about 300 million years ago in what is known as the Pennsylvanian period in the US. It is thought to have fallen from a parent outcrop higher up the slope before the present trees grew. Various wild theories have been advanced to explain the curious pattern: it's the impression of the skin of a giant lizard, a pictograph made by prehistoric man, an Indian carving, or evidence of ancient astronauts. Similar patterned boulders have been found on the east side of Tea Creek Mountain in Pocahontas County, West Virginia. *[Posted by 'Jeff' at www.rense.com 6 Sept 2000.]*

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ILLUSORY PARASITOSIS

"Omigod they're crawling all over me!" DAVID HAMBLING looks at imaginary infestations and illusory itches.

Throughout history, humans have been plagued by lice, fleas, ticks and other skin parasites. Most have been kept at bay by modern pesticides, but one type is immune. They cause itching, crawling or tingling sensations. They spread quickly through homes, factories and offices, and no chemical can touch them. Because these parasites exist only in the mind.

Illusions of parasitosis occur when an environmental factor is mistaken for parasites. A classic case occurred in 1966 when a science laboratory suffered from an apparent infestation of 'cable mites'.[1] After new equipment was installed, staff started to complain of itching in the scalp and the back of the legs and a feeling that insects were crawling over them. The problem affected visitors to the lab and also relatives of the victims. Over the course of five months the lab was treated with DDT emulsion, baygon, chlordane, DDT suspension, warfarin and mothballs. Nothing worked.

A team of scientific investigators were called in. A thorough study failed to find any parasites; nor could they detect any skin lesions on the victims. However, they did find particles of rock wool insulation in the air. The insulation had been disturbed when new equipment was installed, and irritant particles were being drawn into the air conditioning. Once the rock wool was removed and staff were reassured, the 'cable mites' vanished.

Another case centred on a textile factory, where workers blamed 'bugs' brought in imported cloth for an outbreak of dermatitis.[2] Again, investigators could find no actual parasites, and the infestation followed a curious pattern. Instead of affecting physical locations, it seemed to spread through groups who were in social contact with each other, regardless of where they worked.

A third case involved staff working with old, dusty files and who believed 'paper mites' caused their skin condition. The actual cause was traced to irritant splinters of paper. Dust, fibres, chemical solvents and static electricity have also been sources of illusory parasites.

Illusions of parasitosis are highly infectious, which seems to be an example of 'reflex contagion'. This is well known with yawning; if one person starts, it is hard for others around not to join in. It applies to scratching as well. Start scratching, or even talking about fleas and lice, others will scratch too.

This type of behaviour probably has its roots in our primate past. Dr Paul Marsden is Managing Editor of *The Journal of Memetics*, the study of infectious ideas. He suggests that one individual scratching would have alerted others in the group that there were biting insects present, priming them to pay attention to their own itches. Anyone who has been eaten alive by mosquitoes before they knew it will appreciate how useful this reflex is. Contagious scratching also encourages mutual grooming, important for bonding in primate groups ("If you scratch my back...").

THESE PARASITES EXIST ONLY IN THE MIND

Normally, the group would soon stop scratching; but people may exaggerate their symptoms to gain attention, or to get a break from work. The affected lab staff had a dull job scanning experimental results, and other outbreaks typically involve workers with tedious and unrewarding jobs. Skin conditions are notoriously susceptible to psychological influence, and it is easy to see how these factors combine to keep the illusory infestation going.

Sometimes the trigger is delirium tremens (DTs) experienced by alcoholics and amphetamine users, which gives a feeling that the skin is swarming with insects (known as formication). However, many victims experience it as an after-effect of a real parasite infestation. Delusory parasites are highly infectious and spread through families.

Victims have an unshakeable belief that there are live organisms in their skin. A classic indication is the 'matchbox sign', where the sufferer produces a container of supposed parasites. These turn out to be scabs, hair, lint or other material. The condition may lead to self-harm when patients excoriate their skin trying to get at the parasites, or treat themselves with disinfectants or insecticides. They often visit a string of different physicians, trying to find one who will believe them.

Treatment relies on developing a rapport with the patient, showing respect and understanding for their condition. The doctor must tread a fine line though, as showing a belief in the parasites reinforces and 'fixes' the delusion.

The antipsychotic drug Pimozide has proved effective at treating both skin itching and the delusional state. Doctors may have to gloss over exactly how it helps, but if administered it can often achieve a beneficial outcome. Placebos can be effective when the patient has sufficient confidence in them.

It is often difficult to establish what is real when dealing with delusions and illusions of parasitosis. One patient found doctors sceptical of her formication and skin excoriation without visible parasites. Two relatives had the same symptoms, but this also fitted a diagnosis of delusions of parasitosis. It took seven years before the real cause, a burrowing mite, was eventually discovered.

Society no longer has the faith in doctors and experts that it once possessed. Coupled with the growth of the Internet, this means that sufferers from delusions of parasitosis can share their experiences and reinforce each other's beliefs; and instead of destroying parasites, technology may help to spread them.

NOTES

1 HG Scott and JM Clinton, An Investigation of "Cable Mite" dermatitis. *Annals of Allergy*. 1967 Vol 25, No.8.

2 A Kerckhoff and K Back, *The June Bug: A Study of Hysterical Contagion*. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1968.

Recommended Surfing: http://medent.usyd.edu.au/fact/delpara.htm (On delusions and illusions of parasitosis); http://jom-emit.cfpm.org/ (*The Journal of Memetics*); http://www.skin-parasites.com/ (National Unidentified Skin Parasite Association).

FBI HIGH PRIESTS OF THE CHURCH OF DUST

In a venerable Dunstable hotel, a group of regulars get together to explore the other side. MARK PILKINGTON joins the media mediums and orb chasers on a 'Phantom or Fraud?' investigation. All photos by MARK PILKINGTON.

HAPPY MEDIUMS:A circle in the Henry Room (left); team members lie in the path of an energy line while Ross films (right); Graham and Ross in discussion (below).

If Dunstable had a soul it was buried decades ago beneath a seamless expanse of tarmac and concrete. But every once in a while something stirs – an anguished cry bubbles up from the depths below, seeking a way out from this grey sealed tomb. The Hanover Hotel, once the lodge of a 12th-century palace, serves as one of these exits, providing an umbilical link to the past – a fissure in time on the suburb's surface.

And here I was, a guest of the *Phantom or Fraud?* (PoF) team of psychic investigators headed by TV producer Ross Hempsworth and policeman Graham Matthews. There were 20 of us in all, mostly PoF regulars, including Paul and Marion – two large and cheerful Spiritualists ("mediums have bigger *chakras* and larger bodies") a security guard, a publican and at least one housewife. As well as producing several successful Digital TV specials and programmes, including *Ghost Detectives*, PoF run investigative vigils at haunted locations, often with cameras in tow. Today was to be a little different, however: the first in what it is hoped will become a regular series of paranormal investigation workshops, followed by a vigil. "We're probably one of the world's biggest paranormal investigation groups," Ross tells us by way of introduction. "Now the big groups, like ASSAP and CSICOP are coming to us for advice. And I do believe that we're getting close to proof – proof that orbs represent a genuine paranormal phenomenon."

My scepti-sense starts tingling. Orbs, for those of you who haven't seen them, are balls of light, caught almost exclusively on digital cameras. Most photographic experts consider them irritating blemishes, camera flashes reflected off dust motes, pollen or water vapour in the air. But for an ever-growing band of ghost-chasers they represent something much more profound – human souls trapped on the physical plane. Natural light forms such as earthlights, Will o' the Wisps and marsh gas have always been identified with the souls of the dead, but this new manifestation of the belief carries the orbs, or "life lights" as Ross suggests they are called, into a new technological dimension. Orb safaris are now a regular occurrence on the paranormal scene, particularly in the USA, where heading into a spooky graveyard on a moonlit, misty night is sure to result in a carnival of photogenic souls.

"If orbs are dust, why don't we all have orbs in our photos?"

Co-founder Graham Matthews is the group's photographic expert and admits that he's not yet as convinced as Ross that the orbs represent something paranormal – for example, he'll dismiss any photograph in which reflective surfaces are visible – but even he admits that his scepticism is beginning to show the strain. For Graham, the smoking gun would be two photographs of an orb taken from separate points in the same room, demonstrating that it was more than just a photographic glitch.

There is, however, one more piece of corroborating evidence sought by the PoF team – and that's where the mediums come in. In an inspired updating of the long-lost art of spirit photography, the mediums locate a spirit in a room and – bang! – in leaps a photographer to capture it on camera. There has, Graham tells us, been one notable instance of this, when his brother Andy, a TV actor and PoF team member with developing mediumistic faculties, saw an orb sitting on his chest while on a vigil at the Tower of London. Graham took the photo and now Andy is known as the Orb Catcher. This "point and shoot" technique has a 75 per cent success rate, but some orbs remain camera shy, zipping out of the room at first sight of a lens. Here camera traps come in handy. A photographer and medium sniff out orbs in a haunted room. If they find one and it tries to do a runner through an existing door – or a spot on the wall where a door used to be, then – paf! – a photographer waiting quietly outside the room will catch it on the hoof.

"If orbs are just dust, why don't we all have orbs in our photos?" Asks one of the team, "I've been trying for ages and haven't had a single one."

"We're gradually ruling out dust and pollen," replies Ross. "These things are starting to respond to intelligent communication. If they are dust we should set up a church to worship it."

"And let me throw this one in," interjects Graham, "what is dust?"

Are Ross and Graham setting themselves up as high priests of the First Church of Dust, or are they harvesters of lost souls? The night's vigil might just provide an answer…

That the Hanover Hotel is a good place to start looking for ghosts is beyond question. Certainly, the manager has heard

regular reports from her staff of strange noises and sensations on the stairs and up on the second floor, where, coincidence or not, I was to sleep much later that night. The team were to take over two rooms, one on the ground floor – the control room – and another on the first floor, the 'Henry Room', rigged up with an Infrared (IR) camera and the focus of the investigation.

To get us in the mood before we begin, Paul and Marion help us to tune in to the spirit energies around us. We sit in a circle and pass a rose quartz from hand to hand. Then, holding hands with our neighbours, we send the energy emitted by the two mediums around to our left while Paul guides us through a gentle *chakra* meditation, opening us up like radio receivers to the spirit influences. During this process, I begin to see hypnagogic shapes dancing merrily before my eyes, but for others something deeper is stirring. "My whole body was throbbing. It felt so intense, it was affecting my head," says Jan, definitely woozy. Jan has been singled out by Ross as a potentially excellent medium, but she's reluctant to get too involved. "I feel hot and dizzy," exclaims Richard, a gruff London security guard; "I suppose it will wear off," he says, woozily shaking his head. Richard was holding my left hand, but I can't say I felt any energies passing through me, although experience has shown that I'm a particularly bad hypnotic subject.

While we were trancing out, Graham and Ross were busy setting up their equipment – and the heightened energies seemed to be having some effect. "Our radios have been malfunctioning, my computer won't work at all and there have been two flashes of light on the Infrared monitor," Graham announces.

We crowd around in the control room as Ross and Jan head up to the Henry Room, looking like ghosts on the harsh black and white IR monitor. They move slowly in the darkness to a table in the corner of the room, then hold hands.

"OK, they're trying to draw the orb energy in," says Graham, sounding a lot less sceptical than he did earlier in the day.

As Jan and Ross get settled, a cloud of tiny lights flows from the middle of the room to the bottom left corner of the screen. A flood of "oohs" and "aahs" fills the room as we huddle closer together – orbs! Only Paul the medium expresses any doubt – "they're all heading in the same direction – could it be a draught?"

Minutes later Ross and Jan have returned. "Did you see that? Something was trying to manifest – there was a mist in the room. It was a watery apparition, near the pot plant. You tell me that was dust!"

"Jan and I link psychically," says Ross. "She said 'I'm getting a picture of a long thing with two balls'! I knew it had to be her and I – it was a sudden feeling."

"We felt another set of hands on top of ours," says Jan. "She was very gentle – and I saw a small light down by the plant."

"I don't think the spirit we were contacting was from here – it's one I've felt before," Ross continues. "I'm beginning to think that the Phantom or Fraud project has its own spirit

We become astralnaughts – we are entering soul-space

friends – they're working with us, following us around. I'm opening up as a psychic, I can feel it quickly with Jan."

He decides that we should take a break before anyone goes back into the room. "Getting an entity to manifest requires all its energy, so we don't want to wear it out. But the orbs on screen provide the collaboration we need. It's in there and it draws on human energy."

Paul and Marion are preparing their own expedition into the Henry Room, and they're going to take a team in with them. I immediately put my hand up, but am rejected in favour of Angie and Carl. They'd felt the swirling energies more strongly in the warm-up session. Andy the Orb Catcher will join them. After some discussion it's agreed that I can come too, as amanuensis.

The room is dark and musty as we enter, the only light provided by a glowing green exit sign over a door and the orange light from the street filtering through the drawn curtains. One team member remains outside with a camera to catch any escapees. Moving slowly, as if through some viscous energy field, we become astralnaughts – we are entering soul space.

The four circle members sit down, while I remain seated at a respectful distance behind Marion. Paul says a short invocatory prayer to summon any spirits in the room and then all fall silent.

ORB AND SPECTRE: (top to bottom) Graham tries to capture a ghost with his thermometer gun; Jan and Ross draw up orb energy; Crown-to-crown experiment in fill swing.

Suddenly Marion moans: "There's a musty smell filling my nostrils and it's getting stronger. There's a young girl in the corner of the room. She's 14. I've got a Catherine and she's right behind me, carrying something."

I wonder if it's me, wielding my pen and paper, that Marion has sensed; but no, Andy can feel her too: "She's accepted us and is comfortable. She knows we mean her no harm."

I'm peering into the gloom behind Marion. She's breathing hoarsely and heavily, looking for any sign of movement, but there is nothing. Then she starts: "I feel a terrible pain across my shoulders and chest."

Andy responds: "There's someone behind me, a pressure in my ears."

Marion's ample body is vibrating quite rapidly now, her breathing getting rougher: "My ears just popped and someone's wobbling my chair, trying to lift it up with me in it. Someone is touching my face on the right-hand side."

This call and response continues for some time, with various odours, breezes, sounds and touches being felt by everyone but me. The others hold hands and form an energy circle; I feel a tingling in my legs. Pins and needles after sitting immobile for almost an hour. Or something else?

Marion sees a gloved hand, like that of a falconer. Angie feels a large stomach pressing into the back of her head. Paul is heating up and Marion is wobbling again. I feel an intense, dry, prickly heat pass up my body and over my face. "I feel like I'm burning," says Paul. Suddenly Marion lets out a loud breath.

"Scots! Scots! Devils!" she cries in a rasping voice.

"Jacobites," replies Andy, in dramatic tones, "we're English."

"You're a Scotsman." Marion, or whatever is speaking through her, sounds accusing.

"My name is Scottish, but I'm English"

"A borderman… the borderman speaks… Scots… Devils!"

"I have no kinship with Scots," retorts Andy, sounding like an extra from an Errol Flynn film. I later learn that mediums are taught to engage with spirits in tones and language appropriate to their lifetime.

This stilted exchange continues, like trying to communicate with somebody who doesn't understand your language, through a distant intercom. We learn that the spirit is called Thomas and dislikes Scots, but little else of interest.

Later a little girl appears, followed by a deaf old man. Despite his best *Robin of Sherwood* intonation, Andy can't get through and frustration begins to set in. Suddenly, Ross bursts in and takes a flash photo of the room. "Bingo!" he shouts. I take a picture too, ignoring remembered warnings not to disturb an entranced medium. Marion seems unconcerned, but returns to consciousness a few moments later: "I feel terrified," she says. "Rigid with fear."

SNAPPED: Paul, Graham, Marion – and spirit friend.

"A borderman… the borderman speaks… Scots… Devils…!"

Back in the control room, Paul admits that it wasn't a successful session, the communication problems we encountered here being not uncommon. "Some of these spirits are hundreds of years old; they weren't educated."

By now the atmosphere in the control room is electric. The IR monitor is being watched constantly, and any orb action promptly noted. As Paul observed, all the orbs seemed to be moving in the same direction, but in a daring solo experiment I dig a cigarette out of an ashtray, light it, and see which way the smoke goes. It drifts straight up – if there was a breeze it has gone now. Later I'm warned about entering the hot room alone: sometimes the spirit energies can be overwhelming. While I feel no more afraid of the dark than I usually am, I'm also aware of all the psychic energy that's been channelled into this one space, and the prickly heat I felt during the séance. But I feel nothing more.

It's approaching 4am and there's no sign of the energies abating. I sit in the power room, still not tuned in to the soul vibration, despite squatting directly on the freshly dowsed energy line. Ross suggests we perform the Crown-to-Crown experiment – a technique for astral travel. I volunteer enthusiastically but am turned down in favour of four women and one man. Lying with their heads touching in a circle, forming a loose five-pointed star, they close their eyes and relax while Ross leads them on a journey through the astral realms. Twenty minutes later and Caroline is retching dangerously close to my camera – I guide her towards a large plant pot before Marion radios up. Caroline needs to get back downstairs for emergency *chakra* realignment. Another of the women is weeping profusely – "I was trapped under the ground and couldn't get up" – while another feels dizzy and confused. Later, Ross informs us that this is a very dangerous experiment that should not be tried at home. The others stagger back downstairs, leaving Paul and me in the room to soak up some vibes, before being summoned for a final meeting, and then bed.

What went on at the Hanover Hotel was closer at times to fantasy role-playing, or even ritual magic, than it was to scientific paranormal investigation. While this in itself is no bad thing, you do have to wonder whether all of those taking part are mentally – or, if you prefer, psychically – prepared for what they are involving themselves in. What they are effectively doing is experimenting with altered states of consciousness – from mild hypnotic trances in the mediumship circles to out-of-body experiences and what appeared to be sleep paralysis in the Crown-to-Crown experiment. Certainly, this could have damaging consequences for some participants – though most on this night were regulars and enjoyed the thrills and spills of spirit-seeking. Having the mediums on hand to provide psychical first aid is also clearly helpful. The trouble may start when you can't leave the spirits behind – as Ross warned in his introductory talk: "We've been reliably informed that spirits can follow you home."

Increasingly respectable, scientific parapsychology is making some fascinating discoveries, but these tend to concern unusual, though ultimately mundane, human psychology, rather than time-travelling souls and astral journeys. Swamped as it is in tediously repetitive experiments and mind-numbing statistics, scientific parapsychology can never compete with rushing around a haunted house chasing invisible orbs with digital cameras. As science, the Phantom or Fraud project leaves a great deal to be desired, but as a night of immersive psychic adventuring, it's pretty hard to beat.

After all, great churches have been built on foundations far less solid than dust. FT

MORE INFO
www.phantomorfraud.com

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Take part in our FREE, confidential compatibility test today!

What sort of people join a dating agency like Dateline? Well actually, it's people just like you!

In fact recent research reveals as many as 1 in 5 unattached men and women turn to dating agencies to start relationships. And the researchers say this figure is set to DOUBLE over the next five years!

Social patterns and trends have simply changed making the age old role of the matchmaker more relevant than ever.

More and more people are joining from all over the country – from villages, market towns and cities. The problems of meeting people are not confined to any particular locality. The backgrounds and occupations of Dateline members are equally varied – GP's, surveyors, solicitors, engineers, surgeons, journalists, teachers, secretaries, stockbrokers, nurses, chemists, receptionists, bus drivers and even zoo keepers. Looking for a partner is not confined to any class or category.

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These few thank you's speak volumes more than we ever could. You could so easily find out how our service can work for you too.

"a few more letters passed between us and then she phoned me" – "It was a wonderful phone call – absolutely brilliant". "I can certainly say that it was the best thing I've ever done!"

A.H. Derby

"when we tell people how we met, they all think it's a great idea! I just wanted to meet a kind and caring person – and I did!"

J.C. Lancs.

"Thanks to Dateline I have met a very special and gorgeous lady and I cannot believe how fortunate I am! We are ideally suited and feel so comfortable in each others company. It is something that I never thought would happen so I would like to thank you for finding this special person for me".

J.W. East Sussex

"To prove that Dateline really works – here is an invitation to the wedding!!"

T.S. Devon

"Once again I, or should I say 'we' thank you so much for helping to bring us together and we are very happy indeed".

E.O. Roxburghshire

How Christine and Philip found true happiness together!

Christine decided to join Dateline. **"I'm a member of the Territorial Army and through this I meet lots of people, but they are all just very good friends. I found that I didn't meet many people through my job as a teacher at all.**

My previous partner and I split up some time before and I really felt that I needed to try and get some confidence back. It wasn't a case of 'I must find a husband' but I did want to go out and meet people and feel attractive again. Ultimately, I did want to find a serious partner but I didn't set out with the intention of viewing every single man I met as a potential husband or anything!"

Philip contacted me by phone at first – in fact I've still got the notes that I made about him during our calls! I think we spoke a few times over the phone before we arranged to meet up at a pub close to my home. I was really excited, he's a nice-looking lad and he was such a gentleman that I immediately felt everything that I wanted was there. He was really good to talk to and made me fell at ease, there was definitely something there – that initial spark that I hoped would develop."

Philip explained, **"The main reason I joined Dateline was that I felt that I was meeting the wrong type of woman. Also, a friend of my mothers met her husband through Dateline 20 years ago, so I decided that it must be good!** Our first date went very well, Christine was late, but it went well! I thought she had a great sense of humour and it just went on from there until I proposed to her on Valentine's day.

There's an old saying that when you meet the right person you know they are 'the one'. I can't explain it but I just knew that Christine was the right one for me. "Everyone thinks Dateline is a brilliant way of meeting people – they look at me and Christine and can see just how happy we are – it really works!"

How to contact us:

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Marital Status:

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☐ Widowed ☐ Separated

Age: Height:

Please note: Membership is restricted to 18+ only.

Occupation

Religion:

Build:

☐ Slight
☐ Medium
☐ Large

Attractiveness:

☐ V. Attractive
☐ Attractive
☐ Average

Tick which traits closely describe you:

☐ Affectionate ☐ Fashionable
☐ Serious ☐ Practical
☐ Considerate ☐ Conventional
☐ Shy ☐ Reliable
☐ Romantic ☐ Adventurous

Please tick for a liking, cross for a dislike or leave blank for no pref.

☐ Wining/Dining ☐ Jazz/Folk music
☐ Pubs ☐ Classical music
☐ Sports/Keep fit ☐ Theatre/Arts
☐ Politics/History ☐ Watching TV
☐ Reading ☐ Smoking
☐ Travelling ☐ Mixing with friends
☐ Science/Tech ☐ Children
☐ Cinema ☐ Homemaking
☐ Pets/Animals ☐ Gardening
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Min. age: Max. age:

Height: min. max.

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Dept. FORT 35

ARCHÆOLOGY A BLUESTONE BLUNDER

NEIL MORTIMER finds the archæological truth behind an old sailors' tale and uncovers a weird Welsh wind-up.

THE REAL ROBINSON CRUSOE

Ten years after Daniel Defoe published *Robinson Crusoe* in 1719, another shipwreck tale purporting to be a 'plain, honest Narrative of Matters of Fact' was published, called *Madagascar: or Robert Drury's Journal during Fifteen Years Captivity on that Island*. The book described how Drury and his fellow sailors were shipwrecked on the island and captured by the warlike Tandroy people. Ever since the book was published, critics have debated whether the book was true, the orthodox view being that it was at best a fictional work cobbled together from sailors' yarns.

Now archæology has shown that the *Journal* was true after all. A team led by Mike Parker Pearson on the University of Sheffield travelled to Madagascar and checked Drury's descriptions of those parts of the island that he had noted. Drury's descriptions of ancient settlements were excavated and proved to be correct. Certain dialect words included in the *Journal* were also corroborated. Recent reports of a wreck off the island were followed up and two 18th century iron cannon recovered from the spot likely to be the site of the wreck of Drury's ship. In a final twist, the introduction to Drury's story states that the manuscript was "put in a more agreeable Method" by an unnamed editor, who documentary evidence suggests may have been none other than Daniel Defoe. *British Archaeology, Oct 2002.*

SILBURY ABSEILERS AWARDED

Readers will be thrilled to learn that the efforts of crop circle researchers Bert Janssen and Janet Ossebaard **[*FT159:18*]** have not gone unrewarded. The twosome, who enraged croppies and new antiquarians alike by releasing a video of clandestine abseiling missions into Silbury Hill during large-scale conservation work during 2001, have won the Frontier Science Award 2002. The prestigious honour was given at the Hotel Krasnapolski, Amsterdam, and followed an address given by Janssen that was described as "one of the most dynamic crop circle lectures ever". The National Prize, awarded each year by the Dutch organisation Frontier Science Foundation, was given to Janssen and Ossebaard as a "reward for their many years of ground-breaking crop circle research". *http://www.dcccs.org, 10 Nov 2002.*

TARA TIMBER TEMPLE

The Hill of Tara, Co. Meath, is well known as the royal seat of the pagan kings of Ireland, but the history of the site goes back much earlier. Traces of a huge timber circle of 300 oak posts that once stood at the crown of the hill have been discovered during the analysis of survey work carried out between 1992 and 1996. The timber circle would have measured 558ft (170m) at its widest point, with each oak post measuring six or seven feet (1.8-21.1m) across. Tentatively dated to between 2500 and 2300 BC, the site now awaits excavation for confirmation of its age and possible function. *Irish Examiner, 12 Nov 2002.*

NASA DIGITAL IMAGE COLLECTION

The NASA photo that, some say, shows the 1,750,000-year-old bridge between India and Sri Lanka.

STONEHENGE SPOOF

A campaign by shadowy Welsh activist group Carreg Glas to have Stonehenge's famous bluestones (below) returned to the Preseli Mountains in Pembrokeshire whence the stones originated caused outrage in September 2002. The Carreg Glas website outlined the group's aims, suggesting that the stones belonged in Pembrokeshire and that their return could help revive Pembrokeshire's troubled economy. The organisation's plan met with a generally hostile reception, although a small number of supporters was said to back the scheme. Local historian Dillwyn Miles summed up the prevailing opinion: "It's ridiculous. It's something that happened 5,000 years ago. I can't believe that they are serious."

It turned out that they weren't. Ron Brown, Carreg Glas' spokesperson, was in fact an alter-ego of playwright Derek Webb, and the campaign was a hoax to publicise his play 'Bringing Back the Bluestones' which was due to open at the Queens Hall, Narberth, at the end of October. "What's really bizarre is that we've had some genuine people sign on the web in support," said Mr Webb. *Western Mail, 23 Sept; http://icwales.co.uk, 26 Sept 2002.*

NEIL MORTIMER

OLDEST DOOR DISCOVERY

A door in Rochester Cathedral in Kent has been identified by dendrochronology (tree-ring analysis) as the oldest wooden door known in Britain. Research has shown that the timbers that make up the door came from a tree that was felled between 1075 and 1108, which ties in nicely with the period when Rochester Cathedral was rebuilt during the 1080s. Other very ancient doors are known in Britain; the doors of Hadstock church in Essex and the door beside the vestibule of the chapter house at Westminster Abbey are two examples, but only the Rochester door has been scientifically dated. *Current Archaeology, Sept 2002.*

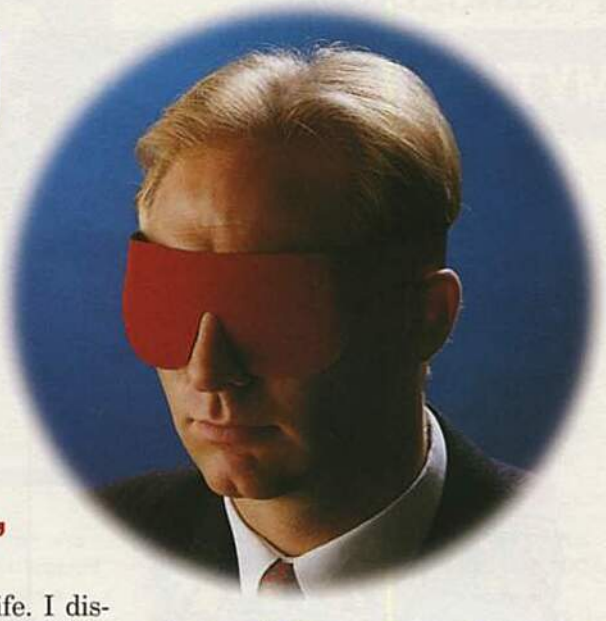
BRIDGE OF SIGHS

A NASA satellite photograph has captured an image of what some commentators say is a 1,750,000-year-old man-made bridge across the Palk Straits between India and Sri Lanka. The photograph is also said to support an allusion to the bridge described in some versions of the Hindu epic oral text, the Ramayana. The 19-mile (30km) -long structure, currently known as Adam's Bridge, is generally considered to be a chain of sandbank islands lying across the shallow Strait.

NASA has rebutted claims that the bridge is man-made, saying they could not provide specific information about the origin or the age of the chain of islands, "and certainly cannot determine whether humans were involved in producing any of the patterns seen".

DN Jha, professor of history at Delhi University, said what had been photographed by NASA was a geological formation. "Linking just anything found with Ramayana... may be mythology, but it certainly isn't history", he said. *Hindustan Times, 10 Oct; Times of India, 19 Oct 2002.*

A Startling Memory Feat That *You* Can Do



"How I learned the secret in one evening. It has helped me every day."

When my old friend Richard Faulkner invited me to a dinner party at his house, I little thought it would be the direct means of doubling my salary in less than two years. Yet it was, and here is the way it all came about.

Towards the end of the evening things began to drag a bit as they often do at parties. Finally someone suggested the old idea of having everyone do a 'party-piece'.

Then it came to Peter Brown's turn. He said he had a simple 'trick' which he hoped we would like. First he asked to be blindfolded. Those present were to call out 25 random numbers of three figures each, such as 161, 249, and so on. He asked me to list the numbers in order as they were called.

Peter astounded everyone by repeating the entire list of 25 numbers backwards and forwards. Then he asked someone to shuffle a deck of cards and call them out in order. Still blindfolded he instantly named the cards in their order backwards and forwards.

You may well imagine our amazement at Peter's remarkable memory feat.

"There was really nothing to it – simply a memory feat"

On the way home that evening I asked Peter Brown how it was done. He said there was really nothing to it — simply a memory feat. Anyone could develop a good memory, he said, by following a few simple rules. And then he told me exactly how to do it.

What Peter said I took to heart. In one evening I made remarkable strides towards improving my memory. In just a few days I learned to do exactly what he had done.

The most gratifying thing about the improvement of my memory was the remarkable way it helped me in business and in my social life. I discovered that my memory training had literally put a razor edge on my mind. My thinking had become clearer, quicker, keener. I was fast acquiring that mental grasp and alertness I had so often admired in men who were spoken of as "brilliant" and "geniuses".

"I can instantly recall anything I want to remember"

No longer do I suffer the frustration of meeting people I know and not being able to recall their names. The moment I see someone I have met before a name leaps into my mind. Now I find it easy to recall everything I read. I can now master a subject in considerably less time than before.

What Peter told me that eventful evening was this: "Send for details of Dr. Bruno Furst's Memory Course." I did. That was my first step in learning to do all the remarkable things I have told you about. In fact, I was so impressed that I got permission to publish Dr. Furst's Course myself.

My advice to you now is don't wait another minute. Full details of Dr. Furst's remarkable Course are available free on request. You have everything to gain and nothing to lose by posting the coupon today.

BOB HEAP

We, the publishers, have printed full details of Dr. Furst's unique memory training method in a free book entitled "Adventures in Memory". For your free copy, either phone 0800 298 7070 free or post the coupon (no stamp is needed) or send an e-mail (see coupon). Or send your name and address to: Memory and Concentration Studies, (Dept. FEM03T), FREEPOST, Marple, Stockport, SK6 6YA.

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MYTHCONCEPTIONS 55

BY MAT COWARD

THE DEADLY HORNET

ILLUSTRATIONS: HUNT EMERSON

THE MYTH

Wasp and bee stings hurt, but hornet stings kill: "Seven stings to kill a horse, three a man and two a child." Throughout Europe, the hornet is feared for its ferocity and for the awesome power of its poison.

THE "TRUTH"

Hornets are the largest of the European wasps, and that's probably where their problems began: they are big, noisy and frightening. They are not, however, aggressive, and are unlikely to sting unless under attack. Even if you are stung, you won't die or become ill (except in rare cases of allergy, of course, as with all stinging insects). Analysis of hornet poison suggests that a grown man would need to be stung about 1,000 times to receive a fatal dose – and since a successful colony contains around 400 individuals, your chances of suffering such a fate might be considered slim. Bee stings, evolved for use against honey-raiding vertebrates, are considerably stronger than those of wasps and hornets, which are used against insect prey. However, because hornet poison contains five per cent acetylcholine, the sting may be slightly more painful than those of other wasps or bees. Incidentally, some wasp stings can cause infection – but hornet stings are clean, as they don't feed carrion to their young.

SOURCES www.muenster.org/hornissenschutz/hornets.htm; www.ivyhall.district96.k12.il.us/4th/kkhp/1insects/waspfax.html; http://userpage.chemie.fuberlin.de/~annine/texte.html

DISCLAIMER I admit it – I haven't put this one to the test; mainly because I don't have a horse handy. Some books and websites still stick to the demon stingers line, though without supporting evidence; if you can help debunk or reinstate this legend, please give *FT* a buzz.

MYTHCHASER

Is the absolute uniqueness of fingerprints a myth, or is that just a myth? If you can dust this conundrum for clues, I'd love to hear from you.

SNAKE FOOD

Surprise snake snack, spirited snake attack, and a sweet little insect

BOURNEMOUTH NEWS AND PICTURES/PHIL YEOMANS

Sam Halls found the head of a grass snake in a Sainsbury's cottage pie children's meal she had bought for her four-year-old son in Ferndown, Dorset. At first she thought the one inch (2.5cm) long grey object buried among the peas and carrots was a large runner bean that had gone off, but then she saw its mouth and eyes. "I dread to think what has happened to the rest of the snake," she said. *Bournemouth Daily Echo, D.Mirror, 11 Oct 2002.*

During his lunch break, a Chinese man named Li uncorked a bottle of spirits containing what was supposed to be a dead, preserved snake which had been pickled for a year; but before he had a chance to sample the drink, the snake leapt out and sank its teeth into his neck. He was taken to a nearby hospital in Suizhou, about 700km (435 miles) west of Shanghai, but was not in danger, the Xin Bao newspaper said. The stopper to the bottle of unidentified spirits was made of cork and allowed some air into the vessel, helping the snake to survive its year-long ordeal. Alcoholic drinks such as rice wine containing preserved snakes or other creatures are popular in China. *Sunday Mail (Brisbane), 20 Oct 2002.*

Tim Hanson, 12, found a beetle suspended inside a wine gum from a packet bought in Bradford, West Yorkshire, by his mother Theresa, who said: "He only saw the insect since the sweet was yellow. Had it been black, he'd have popped it in his mouth." *Sun, 10 Sept 2002.*

STRANGE DEATHS

A COMPENDIUM OF MACABRE FUNERARY CONFUSIONS

TERRY COLON

LOUIS DETHY, 79, A FORMER CHEMICAL engineer who booby-trapped his house in Belgium with the intention of killing his estranged family, died himself when he inadvertently triggered one of his own devices. He had built the three-storey brick and timber house in Pont-de-Loup, near Charleroi, in the 1960s, on land and with materials paid for by his mother. When his wife caught him in bed with another woman 20 years ago, she walked out, taking their children with her.

Dethy became a recluse, and never forgave his 10 daughters, four sons and 37 grandchildren for having little to do with him. When his own mother turned against him, she bequeathed the property to one of his daughters, Jeanne, 49. In 1998, he lost a lengthy legal battle to overturn his mother's will and at that point, police believe, he set about installing the traps, most of them using concealed 12-bore shotguns triggered by barely-visible nylon threads or fishing line.

Following his death, military mine-clearance experts uncovered many traps, among them an apparently harmless but lethal pile of dinner plates, a chest in the cellar full of money, and even an exploding crate of beer. Other shotguns were found wired to the television, a water tank and the bathroom door. Dethy had numbered and catalogued each device and left coded notes for the whereabouts of each.

It took three weeks to crack 19 of the 20 clues, but after taking the house apart the experts were forced to admit defeat on the final one: "The 12 Apostles are ready to work on the pebbles". They concluded that Dethy had not yet put it in place. Device number 18, the one that killed him – which he had either failed, or forgotten, to disarm – was hidden in the kitchen dresser and triggered by moving a soup tureen. "Father was a strange, cold man," said his daughter Jeanne. "He wanted to kill us all." *D. Telegraph, 10 Nov 2002.*

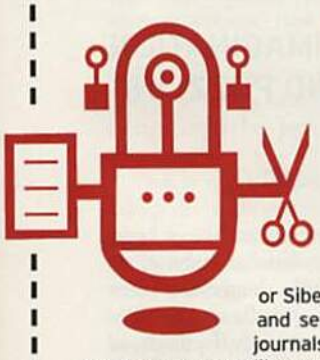
ARTHUR PRATT, 65, OF MODESTO, California, died in hospital on 13 October six days after his wife Kelli, 45, held him down and bit him 20 times when he refused to have sex with her. "Most of the bites were confined to his arm and his abdomen and a few were very deep with major tissue damage," said Sgt Al Carter of the Modesto police. "He was able to dial 911 that night. We have a tape recording of him screaming while she was biting him. When officers arrived, he was screaming that he'd been assaulted. She fought with the officers and tried to bite them too."

Mr Pratt had been released from hospital several days before the incident. He suffered from diabetes, heart and circulation problems. Homicide charges against his wife were pending the outcome of toxicology results. *Los Angeles Times, Edinburgh Eve. News, 18 Oct 2002.*

YVETTE DOW, 24, OF BEAUMONT LEYS, Leicester, allegedly murdered by her lover, may actually have been suffocated by her own anatomy, Professor Guy Rutty told a court in Nottingham on 1 October. The 238lb (108kg) mother of two was found face down, with her head enveloped by "her very large breasts". She had been dead for two days and "desecrated with white paint". Simon Williamson, 26, denies murdering Ms Dow when she ended their affair. *Sun, 1 Oct; NY Post, 2 Oct 2002.*

GIOVANNI GRECO SENT HIMSELF, LITERALLY, to an early grave. Greco, 63, was so keen that his future mausoleum would be a perfect fit that he liked to visit it to ensure the builders were making it just right. He made his regular trip to the construction site in the small cemetery in his hometown of Lascari, near Palermo in Sicily, on 1 September. He climbed a ladder to get a better view of the top of the mausoleum when he slipped, hit his head on a marble step, and fell into his own tomb.

A year earlier, another Sicilian died after falling into an empty grave in a Palermo cemetery. Marcello Petrola, 31, intended bringing some flowers to the tomb of a dead relative when he was forced to dodge an approaching car. He put his foot on a marble tombstone, which broke in half and dropped him into the 20ft (6m) deep grave, which swallowed him up. *[R] 4 Sept; Guardian, 6 Sept; Gold Coast (Queensland) Weekend Bulletin, 7-8 Sept 2002.*



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To minimise the time spent on preparing clippings for a Fort Sort, we ask that you cut them out and not fold them too small. Ideally, send them flat in an A4 envelope. Mark each clip (on the front, where possible) with the source, date and your name, so that we can credit you in the listing (right) when we use the material. For UK local and overseas clips, please give the town of publication. For foreign language clips, we appreciate brief translations. To avoid confusion over day and month, please write the date in this form: 11 Aug 2002. If you send photocopies, copy on one side of the paper only.

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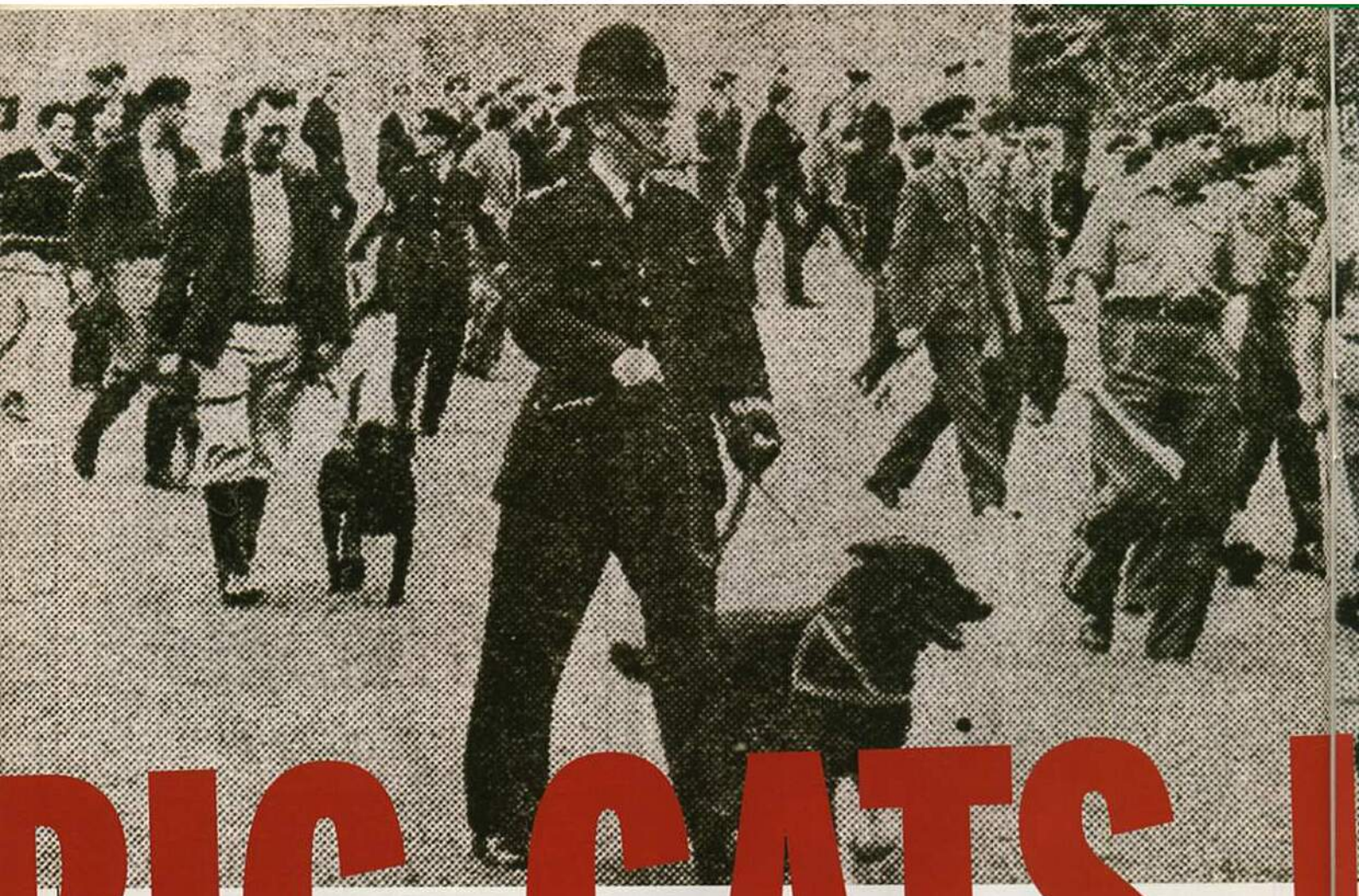
Due to the extra number of clippers involved in this issue's Big Cat Survey, our Special Correspondents have had to remain nameless on this occasion.



BIG CATS I

ALIEN BIG CATS (ABCs) HAVE BEEN STALKING THE NATION – AND OUR IMAGINATION – FOR 40 YEARS. PAUL SIEVEKING RECALLS THE BIG GAME HUNTS AND PUZZLING EVIDENCE FOR THESE SHADOWY FELIDS.

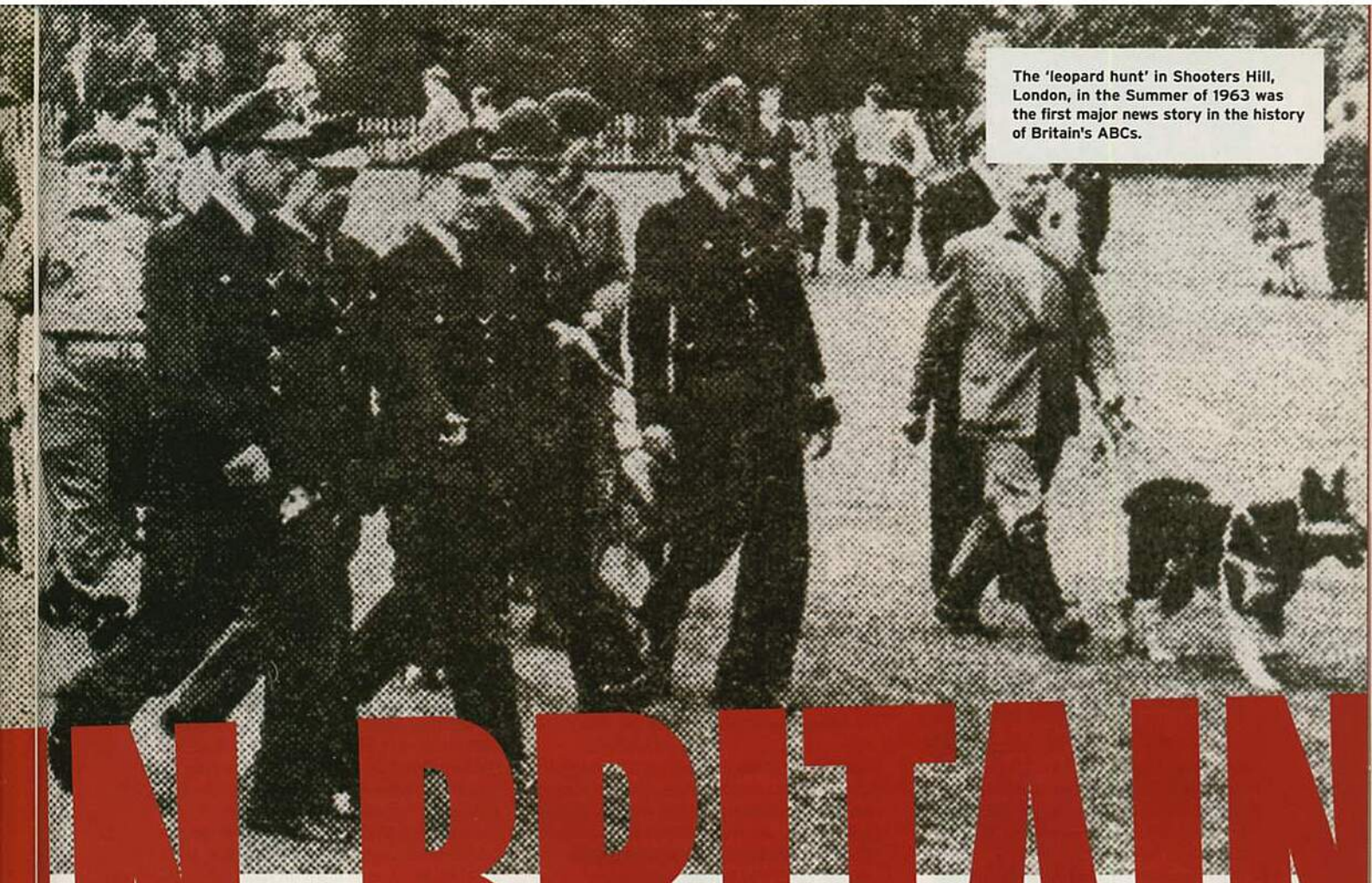
The actress Sarah Miles had a memorable encounter near her house in West Sussex in 1994: "…a large jet black cat stood, posing almost, high on the bank… Roughly the size of Lovely [her Old English mastiff], but with enormous paws, quite out of proportion to the rest of him. His tail, longer than his own body length, was held straight out, with a little curl at the end. His face seemed square from his profile, with pointed, erect ears. Sadly, without turning once in my direction, the majestic animal clambered down the bank and loped across the lane, hips rolling with a loose-limbed, easy gait, before leaping effortlessly up the bank and out of sight." [1]

Although there were sporadic earlier encounters with ABCs in the British countryside, it was in the early 1960s that they became a recognised Mystery, a major branch of forteana, just as flying saucers took on a public life in the 1940s, Bigfoot in the 1950s, and crop circles in the 1970s, though each had precedents. ABCs also appear in many other parts of the world, but there is no room to deal with them here.

While it is likely that breeding populations of ABCs have been established in the British Isles, there may be other dimensions to the mystery. Meeting the unruffled stare of an unknown large felid – as Trevor Bartle did near Falmouth on the night of 4 February 2000 **[*FT146:16*]** – can be a numinous experience, at odds with the animals' supposed retiring nature and reminiscent of encounters with 'black dogs' – known in different regions as Black Shuck, Pooka, Trash hound, Barguest, or Shriker – many of which might be feline rather than canine.

Could some of these big cats have been teleported from their natural habitat, as Charles Fort playfully suggested (*see "Historical Precedents" panel*), or do they exist in our physical world only fleetingly, as other denizens of the fortean menagerie seem to? It is certainly bizarre that numerous ABC hunts with state-of-the-art technology have always failed (with one or two exceptions), while the majority of large felids that are known to have escaped from zoos are caught or killed. According to the Ministry of Agriculture, all but two of the 16 big cats that escaped into the wild in the UK between 1977 and 1998 were recaptured within 24 hours. However, talk of phantoms and teleportation will not appeal to cryptozoologists or strict adherents of Occam's razor.

In the mid-Seventies, the naturalist Maurice Burton wrote to Bob Rickard



The 'leopard hunt' in Shooters Hill, London, in the Summer of 1963 was the first major news story in the history of Britain's ABCs.

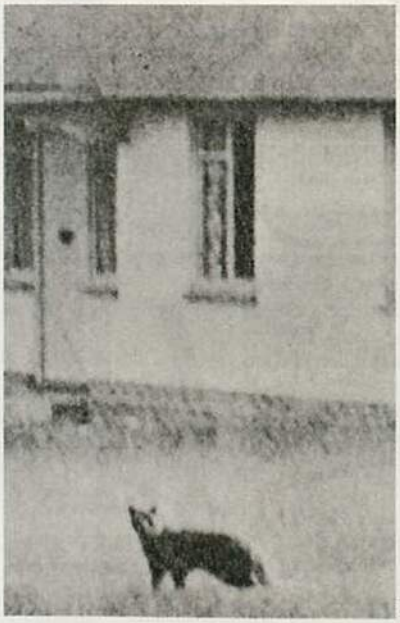
IN BRITAIN

about the Surrey Puma: "All the eye-witness accounts that I was able to investigate at first hand proved to be either otter, badger, fox, deer, or feral cats and dogs." One is left wondering how such identifications could be *proved* after the actual encounters.

This is not to deny that many supposed ABCs are misidentifications of indigenous animals; but over the years, the scepticism of the experts has been worn away by the many anecdotal reports from experienced observers, and the evidence from spoor, livestock depredation, video footage, and alien felids trapped or shot (*see panel*). The orthodox explanation now invokes escapes from unspecified unlicensed private zoos or owners, and hypothetical overturned circus trailers.

THE SURREY PUMA AND FRIENDS

On 16 July 1962, water board official Ernie Jellett saw an animal "like a young lion cub" stalking a rabbit near Heathy Park Reservoir in Hampshire. It stood 18in (46cm) to 2ft (61cm) tall, with a flat face, large paws, and pale brown pelage. It was "definitely not a fox or a dog." A month later, it was seen again by Mr L Noble, another water board official. These first reports, and references to previous sightings and frightened cattle, were hidden away in the house journal of the Mid Wessex Water Company.



FPL

Probably the first photograph of a British ABC, taken by Ian Pert at Worpleston, Surrey, in early August 1966 at a distance of 35 yards (32m). It was sandy-coloured with a total length of about 3ft (91cm).

Not till the following summer did Britain's ABCs first hit the headlines. On 18 July 1963, David Back, driving through Shooters Hill in south-east London at 1am, saw what looked like an injured dog lying by the roadside. When he walked up to it, he realised it was a large cat with a long, upward curling tail. It ran off into Oxleas Wood. Very shortly afterwards, a "large golden animal" jumped over the bonnet of a police patrol car in the area. No zoo or circus had reported any escapes.

The subsequent big game hunt for 'the cheetah' covered 850 acres and involved 126 policemen with 21 dogs, 30 soldiers, ambulance men and RSPCA officials. No large cat was found, but there were some 7in (18cm)-wide spoor with claw marks, supporting the cheetah hypothesis. The cheetah (*Acinonyx jubatus*) has permanently extruded claws, while the claws of other felids can be extended to maintain balance if the ground conditions so require. There were several more sightings and overheard snarls

BODIES OF EVIDENCE

Alien felids shot, run over, or caught in traps obviously provide the best evidence for British ABCs. Unless otherwise stated, the provenance of these animals is unknown. Examination showed that the three big cat skulls found in the West Country (Dartmoor 1988, Exmoor 1993, Bodmin Moor 1995) all came from mounted specimens or rugs. I would like to thank Dr Karl Shuker, from whose article in *Fortean Studies* vol 2 (1995) the majority of the data below are summarised.

FPL

Cheshire leopard cat, 1981.

LEOPARD CAT (*Felis begalensis*), a widespread golden-brown Asian felid slightly larger than a domestic cat. Too small to account for sheep mutilations.
Nov 1981: shot at Crewood Hall Farm, Kingsley, Cheshire.
1987: snared and shot near Yaverland Manor, Sandown, Isle of Wight. Photographed and secretly buried.
Feb 1988: shot near Jedburgh in the Scottish borders. 3ft (90cm) long. Had escaped from a private collector in Cumbria the previous autumn.
15 April 1988: shot on Dartmoor near Widecombe. Less than a year old.
Aug 1990: 3.5ft (107cm) long male discovered dead near a lake in Berwickshire. It had been killed by a blow to the head.

FPL/DR. KARL P.N. SHUKER

Ludlow jungle cat, 1989.

JUNGLE CAT (*Felis chaus*), also called swamp cat or reed cat, a brown, lynx-like species three times the size of domestic cat. Long, faintly striped limbs, tufted ears, short ringed tail with tufted tip. Found in Asia, especially India, the Middle East, and Egypt.
26 July 1988: adult female killed by a car on Hayling Island, Hampshire. This cat (or a similar one) had been seen in the Havant area for at least a week before its death, but similar reports continued for a long time afterwards. No jungle cats had escaped from any English zoo.
3 Feb 1989: emaciated male, about five years old, found dead at Richards Castle, Ludlow, Shropshire. Remarkably similar to this animal was a local one-year-old domestic cat, twice normal size, called Jasper. Its mother was a lynx-like feral cat, possibly offspring from a jungle cat. There are verified jungle-domestic hybrids from various zoological collections, some of which have proven fertile.
Summer 1996: run over in Warminster, Wiltshire, and taken to Paignton Zoo. It was stuffed and can be see in museum in Westbury, Wiltshire.

OTHER BIG CATS

5 Jan 1975: black panther cub (*Panthera pardus*) caught on bank of Medway, East Peckham, Kent. It turned out that a black panther cub had been stolen the day before from Colchester Zoo, 50 miles (80km) away; if it was the same one, it was a mystery how it ended up wandering in Kent.
4 Aug 1975: leopard cub (*Panthera pardus*) with blue collar wandered inside house at Fallowfield, Manchester.
31 Mar 1976: clouded leopard (*Neofelis nebulosa*) from the humid jungles of south-east Asia, shot at Elsted, near Canterbury in Kent. It was one of two that had escaped from Howletts Zoo, Kent, seven months earlier in August 1975.
Late 1970s: puma (*Felis concolor*) caught near Civic Centre in Barnstaple, Devon.
20 May 1980: dead lioness (*Panthera leo*) found in a lake near a disused railway quarry in St Helens, Lancashire.
29 Oct 1980: female puma (*Felis concolor*), about six years old, trapped in Cannich, near Inverness by farmer Ted Noble. He had been on the look-out since 27 October 1979, when he saw a 'lioness' stalking ponies at his farm. The puma, dubbed Felicity, was rheumatoid in one leg, well groomed, overweight and tame – although analysis of her droppings showed that she had been living in the wild. 'Puma' sightings and sheep depredations in the area continued after her capture. Taken to the Highland Wildlife Park near Aviemore, she died of old age in 1985. She was stuffed and put on permanent display at the entrance to Inverness museum.

BBCS

Suffolk lynx, 1991.

1991: Northern lynx (*Felis lynx*) shot near Beccles, Suffolk, after it killed about 15 sheep over a two-week period. The police and the Home Office were informed at the time and asked the farmer to destroy the body and any photos. However, it was put into a freezer for a few days before being sold on to a local game dealer, who had it stuffed and sold it to a local collector, who now has it in his hall. It was almost 11 years before the story and photo surfaced.
17 Feb 1997: African caracal (*Felis caracal*) with a collar shot in Fintona, Co Tyrone, Northern Ireland.

FPL/TONY HEALY

'Felicity' the Inverness puma, 1980.

4 May 2001: female Northern lynx (*Felis lynx*), aged about 18 months, slightly lame in left hind leg, spotted on a garden fence in Cricklewood, north London. Tranquillised after a six-hour hunt and taken to London Zoo.

KELLAS CATS **January 1983:** Black cat, 42in (107cm) from nose to tail, shot in Kellas, West Moray, Scottish Highlands.
June 1984: A beast similar to the Kellas cat, 43in (109cm) from nose to tail, snared at Revack Lodge near Grantown-on-Spey, 15 miles (24km) to the south.
April 1985: A similar cat shot at Advie, north of Grantown.
Oct 1985: A fourth shot near Dallas, near Kellas.
Spring 1986: Kellas cat trapped near Dallas and taken to the Highland Wildlife Park in Kincraig.
Four further Kellas cat specimens were obtained in the late 1980s.
Kellas cats are distinct from the Scottish wildcats (*Felis silvestris grampia*), whose home region this is. They have shortish tails, very large fangs, and black bristly pelage sprinkled with long white primary guard hairs. They are probably either melanistic wildcats or a cross between domestic feral cats and wildcats; but the large size and long legs remain a puzzle.

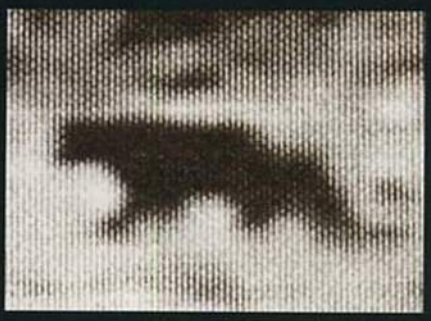
WOLVERINES (*Gulo gulo*) Admittedly not of the cat family, but possibly responsible for some livestock depredation in ABC areas. This fearsome mustelid, a relative of the badger and otter, is normally confined to North America and parts of northern Europe.
1994: found dead beside a road at Wembworthy, Devon.
(In early December 1985, a mystery animal left clear four-clawed tracks when it stole some tripe from Brenda Cornish's farm near Minehead in Somerset. 'Experts' identified them as wolverine. Mrs Cornish had earlier heard hideous screaming in the surrounding woods. In 1994 there were wolverine sightings near Bodmin in Cornwall, near South Moulton on the edge of Dartmoor, in Somerset's Quantock Hills and in Pembroke National Park.)

FPL/ANDREW BARKER

Kellas cat, 1983.

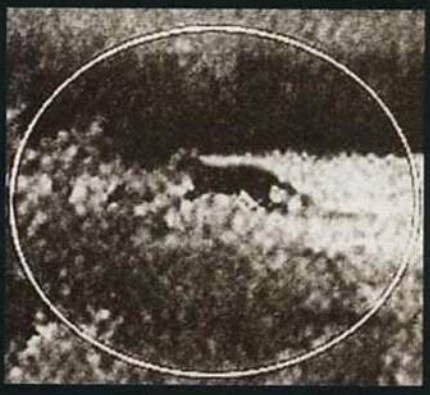
FUZZY FELIDS

Each year, all over Britain, dozens of fuzzy photographs of ABCs are taken. Usually, as these examples show, they provide insufficient data to determine size or species.



NORTHAMPTONSHIRE: ABC near Corby.

CORNWALL: The "Beast of Bodmin".



CAMBRIDGESHIRE: The "Fen Tiger".

OXFORDSHIRE: The "Beast of Otmoor".

DURHAM PUMA

On 16 August 1992, Philip Nixon took this photograph of a big cat carrying a dead rabbit near St John's Chapel in County Durham, the best evidence for the so-called 'Durham Puma', which had been seen at least 170 times since 1986. Droppings found near a savaged sheep in Whorlton, Co. Durham, in September 1993 were examined by Dutch zoologist Dr Hans Kruuk, who was almost certain they were from a puma.

of the 1976 Dangerous Wild Animals Act began to enter press reports. It was thought that many owners were loath to obtain the expensive licences required by the Act. However, I have yet to see any specific documentation for this. The nearest we get is a confession in 2000 by lion tamer Leslie Maiden that in 1974, two years before the Act, he had released a panther and a cougar in the Pennines and that someone else had released a panther in Nottinghamshire. What happened to those animals is unknown.

THE BEAST OF EXMOOR

ABCs were big news in 1983. In February, *The Archers*, the radio soap opera, introduced a "mystery big cat", variously identified as leopard, tiger or puma. Then on 19 April, 50 men, some mounted and most armed, supported by a police helicopter and the Torrington Foot Beagles, scoured Exmoor (in Devon and Somerset) all day for the so-called "Beast of Exmoor" without result. This was prompted by at least 30 sheep killings dating back to 1982, typically with skulls crushed and bodies eviscerated.

The hunt made the front page of the *North Devon Journal-Herald* on 21 April 1983, and featured in the national press the next day. In the following weeks, there were many sightings of large, black/brown/fawn, cat-like animals almost on a daily basis – along with further sheep mutilations. On 2 May, 12 Marines with night-vision equipment began a week-long "Operation Beastie". By this time, the sheep death toll exceeded 80. The marines returned for another hunt on 17 May, but gave up in early July, having drawn a blank.

Exmoor sightings and sheep deaths continued throughout June. Perhaps jealous of the limelight, the Surrey Puma made three appearances in July and there were armed searches for "a lioness or puma" around Earlston in the Scottish Borders.

At the end of July, police chiefs from Devon, Cornwall, Avon and Somerset announced that the Exmoor Beast (or "dog", as they call it) had been shot by a farmer and crept off to die in secret. Some farmers strongly disagreed and *The Times* called it "wishful thinking". Sightings and depredations continued for months, though they tailed off (and/or the press lost interest). It was, wrote Bob Rickard, "a classic fortean story complete with false endings, confusion and petering out into a mystery."

Also in 1983, ABCs roamed around Buckinghamshire, Essex and Inverness-shire, while widespread sheep deaths and ABC reports in Gwent gave birth to the legend of "the Beast of Brechfa". *FT*'s record of ABCs in Wales dates back to a lynx sighting in Powys in September 1980, but I've seen references to earlier encounters.

The Isle of Wight 'puma' appeared 23 times between May and October 1983, changing its coat from black to grey, sandy, silver and "reddish". By September 1985, there were said to have been more than 120 sightings on the island.

In 1984, there were many ABC reports from Surrey, Devon, Cornwall, Argyll and Sutherland; and some from Hampshire, Sussex, Suffolk, Norfolk, Lancashire, and Inverness-shire. Every subsequent year has seen scores of reports from all over England, Scotland and Wales, as tabulated in the annual ABC surveys published in *FT*.

From witness descriptions, the most common ABC approximates to a black panther (melanistic leopard/*Panthera pardus*); but the British countryside also seems to play host to lynx, puma, cheetah, serval, and maybe caracal, ocelot, lion, tiger... The felids are black, grey, all shades of brown, and even white; they are striped, spotted, with long legs, short legs, long tails, short tails, with ear-tufts, without ear-tufts; they roar, they scream, and so on.

ABCs IN THE NINETIES

On the morning of the General Election, 9 April 1992, a golden-brown cat the size of a Labrador was seen next to the church in West End Lane, West Hampstead. Though this was in the heart of London, there were three railway lines nearby and plenty of rabbit warrens. In the following months there was a rash of urban ABC sightings – in Carlisle, Cowes, East Grinstead, Guildford, and Leatherhead. In 1995 they were seen in Falmouth, Gloucester, Southampton, Scarborough, and Dundee; 2002). The BBCS plans to make use of this data to focus on the West Country as a test area for trigger cameras.

Nigel Brierly, author of *They Stalk by Night* (1989), has been following the story since 1983, and has collected a huge amount of data. He maintains that the use of trigger cameras is far more likely to capture ABCs on film than trying to track them down in the wild.

In October we were sorry to hear of the death of Quentin Rose, a big game hunter who had followed the ABC story around the country for over 20 years and became a prominent spokesman on the subject in the media, including at least three TV documentaries. He lectured various police forces on big cats and what to do should they be faced with one. He made a substantial contribution to raising the profile of the ABC issue and I'm sure he will be missed.

Last February, Scottish "rural guerrillas" associated with the Wild Beasts Trust announced that if the Scottish Parliament outlawed fox-hunting they would release three European lynx in the Borders, three in Galloway and six near Mohammed Fayed's estate in Easter Ross. The Scottish Parliament went ahead and banned foxhunting with dogs and there was a subsequent claim that lynx had been released. Lothian and Borders police said they had no evidence of this, but admitted that such a release would amount to a criminal offence under Section 14 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981). The Wild Beasts Trust conceded that the lynx could be a threat to livestock, but claimed that wild lynx in France and Spain choose foxes, rabbits and voles as prey.

On the morning of 26 November, it was discovered that a lynx had escaped from Kirkcudbright Wildlife Park, Dumfries and Galloway, south-west Scotland. Experts believed it would have headed for the nearby Galloway Forest. It was still at large at the time of going to press.

Chris Moiser, zoologist and adviser to the BBCS, said: "While reintroducing lynx might be a criminal offence, it is not necessarily a bad idea. Most biologists, including at least one professor, believe that our populations of grazing animals (the deer and rabbits) do not have enough natural predators to keep their numbers under control. The re-introduction of the lynx might, if handled correctly, help to balance this situation. With an increased wariness of, and tightening of controls on, firearms and the increasing unacceptability of hunting with dogs, the return of one of our long-lost predators might give hope to farmers and landowners."

ABC HUNT CENTRAL

DANIEL BAMPING, founder of the British Big Cats Society (www.britishbigcats.org), describes the aims of the BBCS and the progress made in researching these elusive felids.

The BBCS was founded in the spring of 2001 to identify, quantify, protect and catalogue the Big Cats at large in the British countryside. It now has more than 600 UK members, and is raising funds for such projects as trigger cameras and hair traps in an attempt to identify the species, the numbers of animals, and assess risk to livestock or humans. It wishes to see the ABC population regarded as a (collective) protected species and safeguarded from the gun, as far as is reasonably practicable.

The Society collects data from – and distributes it to – its members, and assists the relevant authorities such as the police, DEFRA and wildlife organisations, in dealing with sightings, evidence and situations as they arise. During the 18 months from March 2001 to August 2002, we received over 1,000 ABC reports – over 500 alone for 2001. We are seeking funding, sponsorship and donations and hope in the near future to become a registered charity and start to develop some serious scientific research.

In September 2002 we held our annual Big Cat weekend at Dartmoor Wildlife Park, Sparkhill, Devon, where we now have our HQ. We presented new video footage and pictures, and data on sheep kills, paw prints, hair samples and the ABC encounters by Mick Cole and Doris Moore (see page 36). Our website, www.britishbigcats.org, has certainly boosted the number of people coming forward – over 27,000 hits so far!

Two naturalists based in north Devon have made significant contributions to our understanding of Britain's ABCs. Trevor Beer, MBE – illustrator, conservationist, and author of *The Beast of Exmoor: Fact or Legend?* (1983) – has been investigating ABC activities since the 1960s, and has collected evidence in support of a seasonal ABC migratory passage across Exmoor, following the game. This year in the *Western Morning News* he highlighted the data collected over a four-month period, combining it with his other data since 2000 and information sent in by *WMN* readers to produce a detailed map of sightings across the West Country (*WMN* 13 Nov

A typical black ABC photographed in 1995 at some undocumented location.

in the following week or so, and the press said that "many local folk" had seen it earlier; then, like so many fortean phenomena, the beast vanished into the woodwork. [2]

In February 1964, 30 police with dogs searched in vain for a large cat after various people had reported seeing it on a railway embankment at East Runton near Cromer in Norfolk. The following August, there was a rash of ABC reports from the Farnham and Odiham areas on the Surrey/Hampshire border, and it transpired that there had been many unreported sightings in the region over the previous two years. Besides the Farnham lynx of the 1760s (*see panel*), puma sightings were reported from Surrey during World War II.

During the winter of 1962–63, cat-like beasts were seen repeatedly at Bushylease Farm, between Crondall and Ewshot in Surrey, accompanied by howling and a strong ammonia-like smell. Then on 30 August 1964, a bullock on the farm was discovered alive, but with severe lacerations to its flanks, shoulders and neck. Incidents of livestock found with deep claw wounds have occurred periodically all over Britain ever since, with some clawed horses in North Devon only three weeks ago as I write (*see below*).

When a journalist coined the term 'Surrey Puma', the public's imagination was roused, and the term was used to cover ABCs of all descriptions right across south-east England. Giving these creatures a name – like the Fen Tiger (1978) the Beast of Exmoor (1983), or the Beast of Bodmin (1992) – is a potent catalyst in the development of popular ABC mythology.

Bob Rickard [3] has listed details of 32 British ABC reports in the 1960s, and 36 from 1970–73, from Buckinghamshire, Hampshire, Hertfordshire, Kent, London, Norfolk, Oxfordshire, Staffordshire, Surrey, Sussex, and Warwickshire – not to mention large feline spoor, droppings, hairs on fences, and livestock lacerations. Bob noted similarities with reports of ghosts and UFO sightings: "...the inconstant data from spontaneous events; the clashing of experts; 'flaps', hoaxes and 'discredited information'; the conviction of the witnesses and the subjective nature of some of their experiences."

Bob's data were largely limited to news clippings received and were only the tip of the ABC iceberg. The Day Book at the Godalming police station in Surrey, for instance, lists 362 reported sightings across Britain of alien animals provisionally identified as 'pumas' in the two years between September 1964 and August 1966. The Surrey police closed their ABC investigation in the summer of 1967, but sightings have continued in the area up to the present. Hair samples collected in August 1984 near Peaslake in Surrey were identified as puma. (Hair gathered on Exmoor was also identified as puma in 1987.)

In June 1974, several 'panther' sightings in Ayrshire led to sharpshooters and police standing by. In April 1975, there was a huge search for a 'panther' in Willenhall in the heart of the industrial conurbation north-west of Birmingham.

THE NOTTINGHAM LION

Early on the morning of 29 July 1976, two milkmen saw what they insisted was a lion with a bushy-tipped tail in a field at Tollerton near Nottingham airport, prompting a huge and fruitless big game hunt. Over the next eight days, there were 65 other reported 'lion' sightings and stories of restless pets and strange spoor. The police then announced that they no longer believed a lion was in the area, and that the sightings could have been misidentifications of large dogs or even of a large brown paper bag (a detail long treasured at Fortean Towers). Despite its debunking, the lion was seen three times in succeeding days before vanishing into limbo. 'Lionesses' were subsequently seen in Thorganby, Yorkshire, in August and the Upton district of Chester in October.

In September 1977, "a lioness and two cubs" was seen in a field 10 miles (16km) from Inverness. In late 1979, there was a flap of ABC sightings in many areas of Scotland; they were frequently said to be lionesses.

Around this time, the idea that some big cats had been released following the passing

HISTORICAL PRECEDENTS

The great English radical William Cobbett recalled in his *Rural Rides* that, as a small boy in the 1760s, he had seen a cat "as big as a middle-sized Spaniel dog" climb into a hollow elm tree in the grounds of the ruined Waverley Abbey near Farnham in Surrey. Later, in New Brunswick, he saw a 'lucifee' (North American lynx - *Felis lynx canadensis*) "and it seemed to me to be just such a cat as I had seen at Waverley." [1]

The 'Ennerdale Dog' or 'Girt Dog' shot dead in Cumberland on 12 September 1810 after a wave of sheep deaths might possibly have been a lion-like big cat; Will Rotherby, who was knocked over by the creature as it escaped from a hunting party, was certainly convinced that it was. [2]

The *Daily Express* (14 Jan 1927) reported that, following a series of sheep deaths in Inverness-shire in 1926, a farmer trapped a "large fierce yellow animal" and sent it to London Zoo, where it was identified as a lynx. Two other lynxes had earlier been shot in the same area. Charles Fort mused that they might have been teleported "from somewhere in the Carpathians" [3]. A puzzling footnote is that London Zoo has no record of having received such a creature at that time.

ABC reports on the Isle of Wight go back to 1895. In January 1940, livestock and rabbits were reported missing on the island, and a creature with the head of a lion and the body of a dog was seen. It was dubbed the Vectis Monster.

NOTES

1 William Cobbett: *Rural Rides* (1830), p204 in 2001 Penguin edition.

2 Karl Shuker: *Mystery Cats of the World* (Robert Hale 1989).

3 Charles Fort: *Lo!* (1931), chapter seven.

and subsequent years in Aberystwyth, Braintree, Cambridge, Chester, Colchester, Ely, Ipswich, Kidderminster, King's Lynn, Lincoln, Lyme Regis, Milton Keynes, Norwich, Nottingham, Southport, Stockport, Stratford-upon-Avon, Tewkesbury, Truro, and some London suburbs. Perhaps, like foxes, they are attracted by easy food sources.

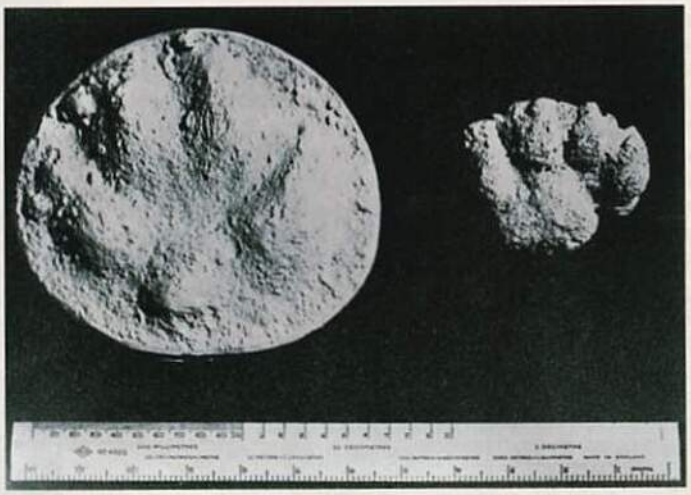
In 1994 there was an enormous number of ABC reports from 30 English counties as well as from Northern Ireland, mid-Wales, and across Scotland. The remains of sheep and calves, stripped clean to the bone, found in Cornwall and north-east Scotland in particular, were said not to be the work of dogs or foxes. Some of the Cornish cadavers showed claw marks on the neck, flank and belly, half an inch (1.3cm) apart with a spread of three or four inches(7.6-10cm).

Between January and July 1995, MAFF (the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food) conducted an official 'Beast of Bodmin' hunt in Cornwall with a budget of £8,200. A wildlife consultant and a mammal expert spent 26 working days examining the evidence and investigating the latest livestock depredations. While they found "no verifiable evidence" for the presence of ABCs, they admitted that they "could not prove that a 'big cat' is not present".

Beast of Bodmin press reports tailed off in 1996, perhaps because local journalists had ABC-fatigue, but other alliterative beasts made their appearance: the Beast of Bennachie in Scotland, the Beast of Broomhill in Yorkshire, the Beast of Bont in South Wales, and the Beast of Ballymena in Northern Ireland.

North Cornwall MP Paul Tyler called for a re-opening of the MAFF enquiry in 1997, and two other MPs demanded the government investigate the ABC situation in their constituencies: Cynog Dafis (Ceredigion and Pembroke North) and Keith Simpson (Mid Norfolk). There had been scores of sheep depredations round Aberystwyth blamed on the Beast of Bont in the preceding couple of years, and some ABC-type livestock mutilations round Norwich; in December the local police said that the 'Norfolk Gnasher' had been seen at least 54 times since the previous July.

A sandy-coloured ABC with a black ring on the tip of its tail was seen twice on 25 September 1998 around South Mimms, Hertfordshire, near the junction of the A1 and the M25 motorway. There was the customary fruitless big game hunt. It was seen again the following day by two policemen and several others, both at South Mimms and in neighbouring Potters Bar. Large pawprints were found.



LEFT: A comparison of a zoo puma's pawprint (right) with one of the prints of the "Munstead Monster", found near Godalming, Surrey, on 7 Sept 1964.

The hunt resumed, backed up by helicopters with thermal-imaging cameras. In the next three days, there were at least 10 more reported sightings of 'The Beast of Barnet' or 'the Monster of the M25' before it made the customary exit into limbo.

A large black cat, identified by the RSPCA as 'puma' (surely they meant panther?), was filmed by CCTV in September 1999 at a brickmakers at Telford in Shropshire **[*FT128:6*]**. There are many other videos and still photographs of alleged ABCs, but it is often difficult to determine their size.

Tigers were a memorable feature of the ABC menagerie in 1999. In April, Keith Baylis saw one as he rode his motorbike across Northchurch Common in Hertfordshire. Then on 16 June, one attacked a tractor being driven by Raymond Cibor at a farm in Armthorpe, South Yorkshire. A week later, it was seen again three miles (4.8km) away.

Then in July, a lion was seen in Pembrokeshire, and several people thought they saw one in the Pennine foothills near Barnsley in South Yorkshire. However, this one was convincingly explained as misidentifications of Rocky, a Rottweiler-retriever cross with eczema, which had been shaved apart from around its head and the end of its tail.

The *Daily Star*'s banner headline was THE BEAST OF ECZEMA.

THE STAR'S BANNER HEADLINE WAS "THE BEAST OF ECZEMA"

SEAN HERNON PICTURES

ABOVE: Gert, a chestnut mare, attacked by an ABC in Holbeton, Devon, in August 2001.
BELOW:: Mick Cole shows the wounds inflicted by a big cat in Gravesend, Kent, in January 2002.

NEW CENTURY BIG CATS

Despite the foot-and-mouth epidemic of 2001 closing much of the countryside, ABCs were reported in at least 38 English counties and across Scotland and Wales that year. *Fortean Times* received about 200 clippings reporting sightings in 2001, as usual mostly from the local press; but data-gathering groups and police have logged hundreds of incidents that never made it to the newspapers; and beyond that there are many who have kept their ABC sightings to themselves, fearing ridicule. Some naturalists now accept the presence of panther, puma, lynx, and jungle cat. Lionesses on the loose, however, are hard for zoologists to credit.

THE BEAST OF BLAGDON

On 17 August 2001, Susan Todd, 49, was waiting in a car outside the Rowberrow filling station just south of Churchill, Avon, on the A38 Bristol-to-Bridgwater road while her husband Ken was buying cigarettes. She was with her daughter Sally and granddaughter Shannon. Looking across a field, she saw a big cat, "definitely a lioness", climbing the hillside about 300 yards (274m) away.

She ran inside the kiosk to report the extraordinary sight and sales assistant Karen Ritchings, 20, called the police. The Todds and Miss Ritchings went out to the forecourt where they were joined by a dozen drivers who had stopped to see what they were pointing at. Two men from a builder's truck went over the wall into the field and the animal ran up the hill and disappeared into woodland. Others are said to have taken photographs and camcorder footage. "It was definitely a lioness," said Sandra Redgers, 50, manager of the filling station. "It came up to here," said Miss Ritchings, indicating a height somewhere near the top of her thigh.

When everyone except Mrs Redgers and Miss Ritchings had gone, the giant felid walked back into view and lay in the grass, sunning itself; but it had gone by the time the police arrived. A search failed to find any clues, although a mutilated sheep turned up on Robert Harding's farm in nearby Winford on the same day. Mr Harding, a former butcher, had suffered three other sheep mutilations since October. This was not [the work of] a dog, a fox, or a badger," he said. "We are talking about throats, shoulders and ribs being ripped open. One of the ewes had her face skinned from her nose right across her head. It would have taken a very powerful animal to do that."

"WE ARE TALKING ABOUT THROATS AND RIBS BEING RIPPED OPEN"

BBCS

Terry Hooper, co-ordinator of the Exotic Animal Register, thought the animal – dubbed in alliterative tabloid tradition the Beast of Blagdon – was more likely to have been a puma, as there had been sightings of them in the area for years. However, witness Mr Todd, 51, who used to work as a security guard at Longleat Safari Park, insisted it was a lioness. "It was too big to be a puma," he said.

By a fine piece of lexilinking, the field where the lioness was seen belonged to a farmer called Jack Lyons. I am reminded of the lioness seen by the Hutchinson family in the Yorkshire Wolds in 1994 – also on 17 August. It was outside the house they had just moved into in Ruston Parva, which just happened to have a stone lion in the garden [*FT80:39*].

CAT ATTACKS

About four days before the Rowberrow sighting, a 10-year-old chestnut mare called Gert was found in Holbeton, Devon, with four deep parallel scratches on her right flank. There were also cuts and puncture wounds to her chest, front legs, and stomach. According to Chris Moiser, a zoologist at Plymouth College of Further Education and advisor to the British Big Cat Society, the wounds were "not inconsistent with an immature puma attack... We can rule out a dog because their claws are not sharp enough to cause these injuries."

In June 2002, a horse in Rhydcymerau, Dyfed, was found with scratches on its back and neck, suggestive of an ABC attack. Then on 2 August, a pony at Vicarage Farm, Ivinghoe, Bedfordshire, was found with bite and claw wounds on her head, legs and belly, said by a vet to have been caused by a large cat. Two horses were also slightly injured. In the following days, a further three horses in the area suffered similar injuries.

On 19 October 2002, a two-year-old Arab filly called Jessica in the Shebbear area of North Devon was found with deep wounds the size of fists on either side of her neck, and deep scratches of her shoulders and hind quarters. Two other horses in the same field suffered wounds, as did a horse five miles (8km) away around the same time. There had been a rash of large black cat sightings in the area.

A sheep carcass was found 18ft (5.4m) up a tree in Great Dalby, Leicestershire, in September 2001. There were claw marks on the

BBCS

NIGEL BRIERLY/FPL

LEFT: Remains of 25lb (11kg) lamb eaten by an ABC. Hair and pad marks were found close by; the hair was identified as lynx. North Devon 1986.

bark. This was regarded as convincing evidence of an ABC (possibly a leopard), as no native predator would haul prey into a tree.

On the afternoon of 17 October 2001, a farm worker (who has declined to be named) was clearing undergrowth on Newick Hill in East Sussex when a large cat with pointed ears, three times the size of a domestic cat, leapt on him. He grabbed it by the neck and attempted to hold it at arm's length to stop its back legs from digging into him. Its long fangs nearly pierced the industrial-thickness leather gloves he was wearing and left him with marks on his hands. He threw the creature on the ground where it let out a "petrifying scream" and ran off into the woods. Its pointed ears suggested it was a lynx. He was surprised by the sheer strength of the animal as he was sturdily built and had handled pigs, sheep and even bulls. Eleven days after this attack, a motorist saw a lynx run across the road in Newick.

The year 2002 has seen two notable ABC attacks. On 9 January Mick Cole, a 43-year-old optician, was parking outside his house in Barr Road, Gravesend, Kent, when he saw what he thought was a fox prowling along the side of a garage with a rabbit in its mouth. Attempting to get it to release its prey, he moved towards it waving his hands. The animal, which by then he took to be lynx, slashed at his outstretched hand, leaving him with three long, deep gashes.

On 11 January, Doris Moore, 52, of Craigieford, near Insch, Glens of Foudland, Aberdeenshire, went out to check on her horses with her friend Wilfred Simpson, 81. Shortly after 7pm, she walked carefully along the 20 yards of icy track in the dark to her car while Mr Simpson locked up the stables. He had difficulty closing the padlock and hit it hard, making quite a loud noise. Mrs Moore felt something tugging on the strap of her ski pants. Thinking she had snagged on something, she tried to pull free, but without success. She turned to see a large animal.

"I didn't hear a growl or anything," she said. "It was all very quick, like the sound of the wind, as it lunged towards me. It was jet

IT WAS BIGGER THAN AN ALSATIAN BUT MORE POWERFUL AND SLEEK

black and was scrabbling with its paw at my trouser leg. It then sunk its teeth into the top of my thigh and I screamed. I was trying to get into the car but it was tugging at my leg. I tried to break free by banging my keys down on its neck two or three times… Its coat was rough fur, but it was too muscular for a dog. It finally fled, but I lost my keys."

Hearing his friend's cries, Mr Simpson ran up and saw what he later described as "a sleek, black beastie" the size of a Labrador with the motion of a cat. It had a long thin body about 3ft (91cm) long without the tail, standing 2.5ft to 3ft (76–91cm) tall. "It was definitely a large cat," he said. "I'm a retired sheep farmer and I've never seen anything like it."

He took Mrs Moore to Inverurie Hospital. She suffered severe bruising and three puncture wounds along her thigh where her trousers were ripped. The wounds were 1.5in (4cm) and 2.8in (7cm) apart. One was 4in (10cm) long, and Mrs Moore is convinced her attacker was larger than a Kellas cat (*see panel*). The flattened hay in an open steading adjacent to the stables suggested that the animal had been sleeping there. It had probably been startled by the noise of Mr Simpson banging the padlock.

The attack prompted the SNP MSP for north-east Scotland, Richard Lochead, to request an investigation into Scottish big cats by the rural development minister, Ross Finnie. A similar request was made in 1997 to Sir Michael Forsyth, then Secretary of State for Scotland, by SNP leader Alex Salmond.

AND IN WALES...

At 8.30am on 3 September 2002, Peter Beese was on his balcony watching a kingfisher with a massive eel at the back of his garden in Shirebrook, near Goldcliff, Gwent, when through his binoculars he saw a large black cat. He had seen similar animals about 10 times in the previous three years. He called the police and PCs Mark Jones and Jodie Warren turned up. "We saw the black head of a feline animal," said PC Jones. "We believed it to be domestic, but then the animal broke cover and through binoculars we could clearly see that it was far too large. It was about 2ft 6in (75cm) tall with a quite strikingly long tail, slightly bigger than an Alsatian dog but more powerfully and sleekly built." After 15 minutes they spotted another cat about half the size of the first, which they were certain wasn't domestic either. After a few minutes they saw the larger animal again.

PC Jones said: "It came across the farmyard and passed between a trailer and a tractor, and as it did so it blacked out one of the tractor tyres completely… it's quite easy to disbelieve reports like this, but I'm convinced now." The larger ABC was reckoned to be 4ft (122cm) long with a 3ft (91cm) tail. A search of the area, assisted by two helicopters using thermal imaging equipment, failed to find the animals. Mike Mazzoleni, an estate manager for the Countryside Council for Wales, who looks after the nearby Gwent Levels Wetlands, said he had seen something resembling a panther three or four times in the previous six months. FT

NOTES

1. Sarah Miles: account in *Daily Telegraph*, 26 Oct 1998, p.14.
2. Janet and Colin Bord: *Alien Animals* (1980).
3. Bob Rickard: "If you go down to thewoods today..." *INFO Journal 13*, May 1974; plus *FT14:3-8*, Jan 1976.

DEFRA (The Department of Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs) collects data on ABCs involving any agricultural damage or livestock depredation. Their website is: www.defra.gov.uk/wildlifecountryside/vertebrates/exotic.htm

Daniel Bamping of the BBCS can be contacted at 5 Hillside Ave, Mutley, Plymouth, Devon PL4 6PR. www.britishbigcats.org

The Scottish Big Cats Society, run by Mark Fraser, is very active. It works with the BBCS but pre-dates it. www.scottishbigcats.org

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The Beast of Exmoor: Fact or Legend? By Trevor Beer (1983).

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Paul Sieveking is a founding editor of *Fortean Times* and has been collecting material on ABCs for many years.

ABC SURVEY 2001-2002

This survey is necessarily very abbreviated. The full listing with dates can be found on the *FT* website. As usual, the majority of witnesses describe an Alsatian-sized black or dark brown felid 18-30in (46-76cm) tall, with a body 2-4ft (60-120cm) long, and a long tail. Any departures from this description are specified. This is only a partial listing of sightings reported to the press. **(FPS)** = Fruitless police search. (M) = livestock mutilation(s). **(P)** = pawprint(s). **(S,M)** = sighting & livestock mutilation(s). **(S,P)** = sighting & pawprint(s). **(BB)** = number of ABC reports during 2001 gathered by the BBCS. **(T)** = See main text.

ENGLAND

AVON: Compton Martin (seen in chicken shed); Rowberrow, nr Churchill (T) (FPS), another sighting three weeks earlier; Ubley, nr Chew Valley Lake (light tan); Winscombe (4 sightings). **BEDS:** Vicarage Farm, Ivinghoe: (M,T); Leighton Buzzard (two ABCs with cubs in tow); nr Dagnall (sandy coloured, seen twice). **BERKS:** Calcot Golf Course, nr Reading (M,P); [BB:1]. **BUCKS:** Westcroft; Little Brickhill, nr Milton Keynes; Loudwater, nr High Wycombe (light brown, two witnesses, spoor identified as puma; domestic cat found wounded); Milton Keynes; High Wycombe (M); **CAMBS:** Sawston; Fulbourn to Teversham road; Thriplow Reservoir (P); A505 nr Pampisford; nr Meldreth; Werrington, nr Peterborough (S,M); [BB:23]. **CLEVELAND:** Middlesbrough; Billingham Bottoms (lynx)(S,P); Hartlepool. **CORNWALL:** Gunnislake (P); Saltash (bloodstains & hair); Launceston; Treggena (beige) (S,M); Trelissick; [BB:7]. **CUMBRIA:** Casterton; Oxenholme, nr Kendal; nr Endmore; nr Windermere; Dendron, nr Leece; Witherslack; Rydal; Shap; Sedbergh; Farleton; Burton-in-Lonsdale; Natland, nr Kendal; [BB:3]. **DERBYS:** Middleton-in-Wirksworth; Matlock; Cromford Hill nr Dene Quarry; nr Bretby; Two Dales, nr Matlock; Birchover; Derby City centre (3 sightings); Normanton; Crich; Belper; [BB:1]. **DEVON:** Kimbland Cross, nr Barnstaple; Holbeton (M,T); Tavistock; Bideford; Holsworthy; outskirts of Plymouth; Woodford Common, nr Colaton Raleigh (at least 7 sightings); nr Crediton (greyish-fawn); Chardstock, nr Axminster (M); nr Morwenstow; Orchard Nurseries, nr Exeter; Shebbear area (M,T). **DORSET:** Yetminster, nr Sherborne (S,P,M); nr Swire; Bridport; Askerswell; Netherbury; Canford Heath, nr Poole; [BB:2]. **DURHAM:** New Brancepeth, nr Durham City (M); Medomsley (tiger-like stripes). **ESSEX:** nr Saffron Walden ('jaguar'); Littley Green, nr Felstead; Great Wigborough (seen killing rabbit); Brent (S,M); Shoebury; Epping; Witham; Little Totham (P); [BB:5]. **GLOS:** Tibberton, nr Newent; Shurdington; M48 nr Mathern; Grange Village, nr Newnham-on-Severn; Brockweir (M) Leckhampton; Bishop's Cleeve; nr Crickley Hill (brown, lynx-like); Down Hatherley; Brockworth (light brown); Standish Woods, nr Stroud ("deafening roar"); B4008 between Quedgeley and Standish; Bull's Cross; nr Cirencester, between Coates & Tarlton; nr Birdlip; Bream, Forest of Dean; Cirencester; Leonard Stanley, nr Stroud; Bishop's Norton, nr Tewkesbury; nr Stroud (ginger-coloured); Gorsley; [BB:58]. **GTR LONDON:** nr Walthamstow Marshes; Cricklewood (lynx caught ***FT148:18***); A323 across Wickham Common (dove grey with black tail); Hillview cemetery, Bexley; Upton Rd, between Plumstead Common and Shrewsbury Park (filmed by security camera); Clifford Ave, Richmond (P); **HANTS:** Southsea; Portsmouth; [BB:3]. **HERTS:** Broxbourne (lynx)(P); Tring; Redbourn (ginger); Readlett (reddish); Leyton Green, Harpenden. **HUMBERSIDE:** Cartergate area of Grimsby. **KENT:** Bean Road, nr Dartford (fawn); Stelling Minnis; Studdal, nr Dover (S,P); East Cliff, Folkestone; Gravesend (man slashed by lynx) (T); Ashford; unspecified woodlands ('lynx' filmed); [BB:3]. **LEICS:** Whetstone; Birstall; Earl Shilton; Broughton Astley; Leicester; Tansley; Starkholmes; Broughton Astley; Great Dalby (sheep carcass up tree) (T); nr Harby; Ketton, nr Oakham; Mountsorrel; Quorn; Barrow; [BB:63]; Leicestershire & Rutland Panther Watch logged 160 sightings in 2000 and 42 in the first eight months of 2001. **LINCS:** Gedney (puma)(P); Laughton Forest, nr Gainsborough (light brown); [BB:1]. **NORFOLK:** Scratby; Congham; Wormegay (two ABCs seen together); North Runcton; Poringland (brown); Mileham; New Costessey; [BB:45]; Operation Big Cat logged 55 Norfolk sightings in 2001, and 51 in 2002 (up to 5 Oct). **NORTHANTS:** Milton Keynes; A5199 nr Welford; Towcaster; Overstone (S,P); Wappenham; Weldon, nr Corby; nr Sywell; A508 on outskirts of Northampton; [BB:1]. **NORTHUMBERLAND:** Lanehead, Bellingham; Rothbury; Alnwick; Hillside West; Byrness; [BB:4]. **NOTTS:** Hallcroft Fisheries, East Retford. **OXON:** Ducklington, nr Whitney; Wroxton (grey); Fenny Compton; Boddington Reservoir (grey); [BB:1]. **SALOP:** Broseley; nr Atcham; Overton-on-Dee (rust-coloured); Ellesmere; Dovaston Heath; Sheriffhales, nr Shifnal; Telford; Kinlet; Whitchurch; Ironbridge; Hawkstone Park nr Wem; nr Tushingham; nr Dudleston Heath; Knowle Gate, nr Ludlow (car found with bumper nearly ripped off, bite marks on wing mirrors and mudflaps, scratches and large pawprints all over it. Blood samples later shown to be dog).; [BB:2]. **SOMERSET:** Wells; west of M5, nr Junction 22; nr Simonsbath, Exmoor; Twitchen, Exmoor (deafening high-pitched scream); nr Glastonbury (P); [BB:7]. **STAFFS:** Fenton, Stoke-on-Trent; [BB:2]. **SUFFOLK:** nr Hadleigh; A134 at Leavenheath (sandy coloured); [BB:15]. **SUSSEX:** Duncton; Graffham; Langley Green; nr Frogetts Heath, Newchapel; Henfield; Horsted Keynes; Wolstonbury Hill, Hurstpierpoint (light brown); Newick Hill (lynx leapt on farm worker) (T); Markstakes Common, North Chailey; [BB:3]. **SURREY:** nr Godalming; [BB:4]. **WARKS:** Keresley, nr Coventry (P). **W MIDLANDS:** Bodymoor Heath, nr Sutton Coldfield; Beacon Road, Walsall (brown). **WILTS:** Coulston (M,P); Wingfield; Edington on Salisbury Plain; Castle Eaton, nr Highworth; between Great Bedwyn and Shalbourne; Rowden Hill, Chippenham; Battlesbury Hill, nr Warminster; Southwick, nr Trowbridge; nr Warminster; [BB:2]. **WORCS:** Wychbold; Warndon; Bringsty Common (P); nr Bromyard; [BB:1]. **YORKS:** Summerbridge, nr Harrogate (S,M); Rodney Park in Leeds; Meanwood area; nr Settle; West Lutton, nr Malton; Brompton-by-Sawdon; Staintondale (M); Osgodby; Cowling (S,M); Hackness; nr Skidby; Newby Cote, nr Ingleton; Kirkheaton, Huddersfield (S,M); nr Kirkheaton (sandy-coloured); Redeness, nr Goole; Scotton, nr Richmond; nr Wighill; nr Snainton; Faxfleet Grange Farm, nr Goole (six cows broke out of field, swam across Humber Estuary to a sandbank as they apparently tried to escape ABC; tranquillised and airlifted home by RAF); [BB:8].

IRELAND

Richhill, South Armagh; Rearcross, Tipperary (striped bushy tail); Blessington, west Wicklow ('cheetah').

SCOTLAND

Aberdeenshire: Peterculter; nr Elrick; between Millbank and Tornaveen (light grey/brown); Aberdeen; nr Insch, (attack by ABC) (T); Stonehaven, south of Aberdeen; Inverurie. **Angus:** Inverkeilor; Edzell; Carnoustie. **Argyll:** Tighnabruaich. **Ayrshire:** nr Dunure; nr Galston; nr Fenwick; nr Stewarton; Darvel; nr Galston (fawn coloured); Ballantrae; nr Dundonald (M); Sorn. **Dumfries & Galloway:** Annan; nr Moffat; Annandale (M). **Fife:** between Cupar and Rathillet (S,M); Leuchars; Craigieford, Dysart; nr Rathillet. **Grampian:** Braemar; Forgue (M); Bennachie (S,P); nr Ballater; nr Boddam, (corpse of striped big cat discovered, around 3.5ft long with part of head missing, possibly a wildcat-domestic hybrid, although the tail was too long; perhaps it was the cub of a larger animal). **Lothian:** nr Haddington; Balerno, Pentland Hills; Ormiston. **Renfrewshire:** Johnstone (tan colour) (FPS); Foxbar ('lynx'). **South Lanarkshire:** nr Biggar. **Strathclyde:** Oban. **Strathmore:** nr Montrose. **Sutherland:** nr Golspie, (light brown); Dornoch. **Tayside:** Monifieth; Old Scone (fawn coloured); Pitscandly Park, nr Forfar (swan found "torn to bits"); Ballumbie, nr Dundee; [BB:85].

WALES

Clwyd: Overton-on-Dee, (reddish-brown); nr Bangor-on-Dee; Abenbury Fields. **Dyfed:** Cilyrychen, (sandy colour); Whitland; Rhydcymerau, (M,T); nr Aberystwyth; Capel Dewi, Carmarthen, (S,M); Croes Goch, nr St David's. **Glamorgan:** Tonmawr, nr Maesteg. **Gwent:** Abertillery, (S,P); Chepstow, (M); Plasmarl (ABC, brown with pointed ears, enters house through window, attacks domestic cat, bites woman on hand); Vauxhall Fields, Monmouth (two lynx-like ABCs); Shirenewton; Rogiet; Llanvaches; Trellech; Blaenavon (S,M); Goldcliff, nr Newport (two ABCs) (T) (FPS). **Gwynedd:** Llanuwchllyn, nr Bala. **Powys:** Llangorse. **West Glamorgan:** Pontardawe; nr Port Talbot, (M); [BB:72].

[Other BBCS sighting statistics for 2001: Cheshire 3, Lancashire 2, Herefordshire 1, Middlesex 1, Worcestershire 1.]

SOURCES

WDP = Western Daily Press. WMN = Western Morning News.

AVON 2001: Sunday Mirror, 22 July; Bristol Eve. Post, 27 July, 22+24+30 Aug; D.Mail, 22+23 Aug; Yorkshire Post, 24 Aug. **2002:** Bristol Eve. Post, 11 April; Weston & Worle News, 18 April, 2 May. **BEDS 2002:** Leighton Buzzard Observer, 6+20 Aug; Dunstable on Sunday, 11 Aug. **BERKS 2002:** Reading Weekend Post, 15 Feb. **BUCKS: 2001:** Milton Keynes Citizen, 4 Jan, 15 Feb, 31 May, 16 Aug; Eve. Standard, Metro, 16 May; Bucks Free Press, 18+25 May; Milton Keynes on Sunday, 20 May; Sun, 30 May; South Bucks Star, 31 May. **2002:** South Bucks Star, 31 Jan, 14 Feb, 29 Aug. **CAMBS 2001:** Cambridge Eve. News, 24+31 Mar, 6 June, 10 July. **2002:** Peterborough Eve. Telegraph, 14 Feb. **CLEVELAND 2001:** Middlesbrough Eve. Gazette, 2 Aug, 3+28 Jan (2002). **2002:** Hartlepool Mail, 30 Aug, -Sept. **CORNWALL 2001:** Sunday Express, 14 Jan; WMN, 20 Feb, 29 Sept, 2 Oct; Cornish Guardian, 8 Feb, 22 Mar. **2002:** Cornishman, 18 July; West Briton, 31 Oct. **CUMBRIA 2001:** Westmorland Gazette, 23 Feb. **2002:** Sun, 26 Jan; Westmorland Gazette, 19 April, 5 July; North-West Eve. Mail, 31 Aug. **DERBYS 2001:** Matlock Mercury, 25 May, 28 June, 5+12 July; Derbyshire Times, 21 June. **2002:** Burton Mail, 23 Jan; Matlock Mercury, 2 May; Derby Eve. Telegraph, 6 Aug; BBC Radio Derby, 5 Nov. **DEVON 2001:** North Devon Journal, 18 Jan; WMN, 23 Aug, 3 Sept; Plymouth Eve. Herald, 23 Aug; D.Telegraph, D.Mail, etc, 24 Aug. **2002:** Exmouth Journal, 24 Jan; WMN, 27 Mar, 11 July, 5+29+30 Aug, 6 Nov; WDP, 2 Aug; Sunday Telegraph, 4 Aug; North Devon Journal, 25 Sept, 7 Nov. **DORSET 2001:** WDP, 2 Mar; Blackmore Vale Magazine, 24 Aug (2002). **2002:** Dorset Echo, 26 Jan, 27 Aug; Bridport & Regis News, 10 Aug; Fosse Way Magazine, 18 Aug; Western Gazette, 5 Sept; Bournemouth Daily Echo, 21 Sept, 29 Oct. **DURHAM 2001:** Northern Echo, 12 April. **2002:** Newcastle Journal, 25 July. **ESSEX 2001:** Sun, D.Mirror, 6 Jan; Colchester Eve. Gazette, 8 Aug, 1 Oct; D.Telegraph, 29 Dec. **2002:** Eve. Echo (?Southend), 10 Jan; Epping Star, Braintree & Witham Times, 4 July; Braintree & Witham Weekly News, 11 July. **GLOS 2001:** Glos. Citizen, 5 Feb, 9 Mar, 14 May, 22 June, 17+23 Aug, 27 Sept, 13 Nov; Glos. Echo, 19 Feb, 2+9+15 May, 7 Nov; Forest of Dean & Wye Valley Review, 2 Mar, 13 April. **2002:** Gloucester Echo, 29 Jan, 7 Nov; Gloucester Citizen, 14 Mar, 9 April, 13 Aug, 5 Sept, 5+21 Oct. **GTR LONDON 2001:** Walthamstow Guardian, 25 Jan ***FT148:18***; pers. comm. from Barbara Bates, 21 Dec. **2002:** Woolwich & Plumstead News Shopper, 28 Aug, 18 Sept; Greenwich News, 18 Sept, 9 Oct; Richmond & Twickenham Times, 20 Sept. **HANTS 2002:** The News (Portsmouth), 14 June, 13 July. **HERTS 2001:** Lea Valley Star, 23 May; Hemel Hempstead Gazette, 29 Aug. **2002:** Hertfordshire Advertiser, 25 July, 1+8 Aug. **HUMBERSIDE 2001:** Grimsby Eve. Telegraph, 31 July. **KENT 2001:** Eve. Standard, 3 Feb; Herne Bay Gazette, 28 May; Dover Express, 19 July. **2002:** Kent Express, 1 Aug; Kent Big Cat Research, 14 Aug; News Shopper (town unspecified), 18 Sept; Kent Messenger Gazette, 11 Oct; **LEICS 2001:** Leicester Mercury, 26 Feb, 20 April, 9 July, 23 Aug, 22 Sept; Matlock Mercury, 2 Aug; Hinckley Times, 23 Aug. **2002:** Melton (Notts) Times, 22 Aug; Leicester Marcury, 5 Sept. **LINCS: 2002:** Times, 3 June; Lincolnshire Echo, 26 July. **NORFOLK 2001:** Eastern Daily Press, 21 April; Lynn News, 3 Aug, 1+8+15+25 May; D.Telegraph, Sun, 3 May; Eastern Eve. News, 15 Nov. **2002:** Eastern Daily Press, 10 May; Norwich Eve. News, 25 July; Eastern Eve. News, 7 June. **NORTHANTS 2001:** Milton Keynes Citizen, 4 Jan; Welford Bugle No.159, Feb; Northampton Chronicle & Echo, 12+19+20 April. **2002:** Northampton Chronicle & Echo, 30 Jan, 4 Sept, 25 Oct, 2(?) Nov; Northants Eve. Telegraph, 16 July. **NORTHUMBERLAND: 2001:** Hexham Courant, 18 May; Northumberland Gazette, 16+23 Aug; Newcastle Journal, 25 Aug. **2002:** Hexham Courant, 13 Sept. **NOTTS: 2002:** Retford Times, 11 July. **OXON 2001:** pers. comm. **2002:** Banbury Guardian, 18+25 April. **SALOP 2001:** Shropshire Star, 2+8+10+31 Aug, 5+7 Sept, 21 Oct. **2002:** Shropshire Star, 8 Aug, 18+21 Oct, 26 Nov; Sun, D.Mirror, 19 Oct; . **SOMERSET 2001:** WDP, 3 Feb; pers. comm. **2002:** North Devon Journal, 18 April; WDP, 1 May, 29 Oct. **STAFFS 2002:** Stoke Sentinel, 14 Sept. **SUFFOLK 2001:** pers. comm; East Anglian Daily Times, 22 Sept. **SURREY 2002:** pers. comm. From Lee-Stuart Evans, 29 April. **SUSSEX 2001:** Midhurst & Petworth Observer, 8 Mar; Crawley News, 2 May; East Grinstead Observer, 9 May; Mid Sussex Times, 28 June, 5 July, 30 Aug, 25 Oct, 1+8+22 Nov; Sussex Express, 26 Oct. **2002:** Mid Sussex Times, 18 April; Sussex Express, 19 April. **WARKS 2002:** Trinity Mirror, 19 Oct. **WEST MIDLANDS 2002:** Birmingham Eve. Mail, 11 June; Sutton Coldfield Observer, 14 June. **WILTS 2001:** Swindon Eve. Advertiser, WDP, 6 Jan; Trowbridge Star, 29 Mar, 5 April; White Horse News, 24 May. **2002:** Wiltshire Gazette & Herald, via ThisisWiltshire, 3 May, 20 June, 8 Aug; Wiltshire Times, 23 Aug; Warminster Journal, 23 Aug; Wiltshire Times, via ThisisWiltshire, 13 Sept. **WORCS 2001:** WDP 1+3 Oct. **2002:** Worcs. Eve. News, 7 Nov. **YORKS 2001:** Scarborough Eve. News, 22 Jan, 11+23+30 April, 2+12 May, 9 June; Darlington & Stockton Times, 26 Jan; Yorkshire Eve. Post, 31 Jan, 5+6+13 Feb, 18 June; Northern Echo, 20 April; Bradford Telegraph & Argus, 6+8+9 June; Keighley News, 8 June; Hull D.Mail, 29 Aug; Westmorland Gazette, 14 Sept. **2002:** Yorkshire Post, 28 Jan, 9 Feb; York Eve. Press, 13 Feb, 13 April; London Eve. Standard, Halifax Eve. Courier, 18 April; Metro, D.Post, 19 April. **IRELAND 2001:** Irish Examiner (Cork), 22 May; Sunday People (Northern Ireland), 10 June. **2002:** Nenagh (Tipperary) Guardian, 2 Mar; Sunday World (Dublin), 21 July. **SCOTLAND 2001:** Dundee Courier & Advertiser, 3+18 Jan, 19 July, 19 Nov; D.Express, 3 Jan; Aberdeen Eve. Express, 10+11 Jan, 16 April, 15 May; Aberdeen Press & Journal, 11 Jan, 16+19 April, 7+9+12 May; Inverness Courier & Advertiser, 18 Jan, 13 July; Montrose (Forfar) Review, 22 Feb; Northern Times, 20 April; Edinburgh Eve. News, 22 May, 20+30 July; Dundee Eve. Telegraph, 18 June, 18 July, 10 Dec; Sun, 12 Dec. **2002:** Aberdeen Press & Journal, 14+16 Jan, 22+23 Feb, 5 Mar, 1+2+3 May, 4+29 July, 28 Aug; D.Record, 15 Jan; Sunday Post, 17 Jan, 22 Sept; Aberdeen Eve. Express, 17+25 Jan, 28 Aug; Sunday Herald, News of the World, 20 Jan; Scottish News of the World, 27 Jan; Scotsman, 2 Feb, 15 July, 2 Sept; Dundee Eve. Telegraph, 31 Mar, 5 June, 4 Nov; John O'Groat Journal, 10 May; Kilmarnock Standard, 17 May; Dundee Courier & Advertiser, 3+4 June, 4 July, 23 Sept; Oban Times, 11 July; Inside Scotland (Renfrewshire), 5 July; Scottish Sun, 5 July; Southern Reporter (Galashiels), 9 Aug; Glasgow Herald, 28 Aug; D.Mail, 9 Sept. **WALES 2001:** South Wales Eve. Post, 11 Jan; Western Mail, 3 Feb, 20+25 Aug; Forest of Dean & Wye Valley Review, w/e 6 April; South Wales Eve. Post, 13 June, 9 Oct; Wrexham Eve. Leader, 14+22 June, 15+22 Aug; Mail (North Wales), 28 June; South Wales Argus, 20+21 Aug, 8 Sept. **2002:** Western Mail, 2 Feb, 24 June; Brecon & Radnor Express, 7 Feb; South Wales Argus, 8 Feb; Western Telegraph, 6 Mar; Western Mail, 19 Mar, 20 Aug, 19 Sept, 5+21+22 Oct; South Wales Argus, 29 June, 16 July, 4 Sept, 25 Oct; Carmarthen Journal, 3 July, 2+30 Oct; Sunday Mirror, 21 July; BBC News, 28 Aug, 3 Sept; Independent, D.Mail, etc, 4 Sept; D.Telegraph, Denbighshire Free Press, 5 Sept.

ABC ROUNDUPS 1962-2002

1962-73 - ***INFO.13:3-18***. 1974 (Ayrshire puma) - ***FT6:3***. 1974 - ***FT137:12***. 1975 - ***FT9:16-18***. 1964-75 - ***FT14:3-8***. 1976 (Nottingham lion) - ***FT18:25-27***. 1975-76 - ***FT20:18-20***. 1977-78 - ***FT25:33-36***. 1976-78 - ***FT26:42-44***. 1979 - ***FT30:8-10***. 1979-80 - ***FT32:23-26***. 1980 (Powys; + Cannich puma trapped) - ***FT34:18-25,34***. 1981 - ***FT35:44-45***. 1982-83 (Exmoor Beast etc) - ***FT40:52-61***. 1983-84 - ***FT42:40-44***. 1984-85 - ***FT44:28-31***. 1983-85 (Black beasts of Moray) - ***FT45:10-12***. 1985-86 - ***FT46:20-21***. 1986 (Moray cats) - ***FT47:14***. 1987 (Eccles Cheetah) - ***FT50:7***. 1988 (leopard cat shot etc) - ***FT52:26-27***. 1988-89 - ***FT53:8-9***. 1989-90 - ***FT54:30-31***. 1985-89 (Hayling Island swamp cat etc) - ***FT55:44-46***. 1990-91 - ***FT59:18-20***. 1992 - ***FT63:20***. 1992 - ***FT64:44-45***. 1988-93 (Jungle cats & hybrids) - ***FT68:50-51***. 1993 (Jungle cat hybrids?) - ***FT72:46***. 1992-93 - ***FT73:41-44***. 1992-93 (OOP wolverines) - ***FT85:36-37***. 1994 (north London 'lion' hunt) - ***FT75:11*** 1994 - ***FT80:37-43***. 1994 (spoor recognition) - ***FT82:56***. 1995 (MAFF investigation etc) - ***FT83:44-45***. 1995 - ***FT88:28-31***. 1996 - ***FT101:23-26***. 1997 - ***FT111:14-15***. 1998 - ***FT121:20-21***. 1999 ('Puma' on CCTV in Telford) - ***FT128:6***. 1999 - ***FT133:18-19***. 2000 - ***FT140:6***. 2000 - ***FT146:16-17***. 2001 (Cricklewood lynx) - ***FT148:18***.

GO WEST, YOU

IN THE PANTHEON OF FOUNDERS OF THE NEW WORLD, PERHAPS THE STRANGEST IS THE WELSH PRINCE MADOG. IN THIS FIRST OF TWO ARTICLES, SIMON YOUNG EXAMINES THE FRAGMENTS OF EVIDENCE THAT MAY SUPPORT THIS CLAIM. ILLUSTRATIONS BY CHRIS GARBUTT.

Madog – the 12th-century Welsh prince who is said to have reached America in the 1170s – has not been forgotten. This figure, whose 'discovery' was once canvassed – some say invented – by the English crown, has become one of the less convincing aspirants for pre-Columbian voyages to the New World. However, individuals and groups scattered around the globe still support his claim. It is a rainbow coalition which is, perhaps, more colourful than convincing. Modern *Madogwys* – 'the people of Madog' – include scholars working under the auspices of the Church of Latter Day Saints, the Daughters of the American Revolution (Alabama chapter), some middle-class Americans who got high on Barry Fell, radical Welsh nationalists and the modern descendants (regrettably few) of the Mandans, the Amerindians who are supposed to have Welsh blood. [1]

For anyone new to the problem, the best place to start is the 'Madog River'. This is not the Alabama River which reaches the sea in the Gulf of Mexico and up which the *Madogwys* claim the great prince sailed in c.1170, escaping from civil war in his own land with a select band of followers. Rather, the 'Madog River' is the flow of modern information and misinformation about Madog, and anyone who wants to get at what actually happened has no choice but to return to its source.

Nothing very unusual about that, you might think. All historical problems caught between legend and fact can be reduced to something similar. What is unusual about the metaphorical Madog River is that it divides almost immediately. The first of these smaller 'waterways' is full of beavers and mosquitoes, and God help you if you drink the water without boiling it first. This is the American side of the legend: Brittonic hill-forts found in the southern states; and Indians – the women peculiarly white-skinned – who can count to 10 in Welsh.

The second 'river' – an untroubled hill-stream with rowans on the bank – is the Welsh side of the legend, with the mediæval references to Madog that turn up in manuscripts and the folk stories from the principality, some of which are still told there.

The million-dollar Madog question is whether these two 'rivers' ultimately spring from the same source; or whether they are, instead, unrelated phenomena brought together by the overworked imagina-

NG WELSHMAN

tion of the *Madogwys*.

The obvious 'river' to start on is the Welsh one. It is, after all, in Wales that Madog's legend and, perhaps, his reality began. However, most of the Welsh evidence (or evidence deriving from Wales) is usually disqualified out of hand. Why? Quite simply, because the bulk of it was first recorded in the 16th century; in other words, it dates to *after* Columbus' discovery of America. If you are wondering how this could possibly matter, consider the following text written in 1589. A moment's perusal should show you that, by this time, authors who wrote about Madog had what the legal profession refers to as "ulterior motives"…

"'*Madoc [..] left the land in contention betwixt his brethren, and prepared certaine ships with men and munition, and sought adventures by seas, sailing west, and leaving the coast of Ireland so far north, that he came to land unknowen, where he saw manie strange things. This land must needs be some part of that countrie of which the Spaniards affirm themselves to be the first finders sith Hanno's time; for by reason and order of Cosmographie, this land, to the which Madoc's came, needs be some part of Nove Hispania or Florida. Whereupon it is manifest that this countrie was long before by Brytaines discovered, afore either Columbus or Americus Vesputius lead anie Spaniardes thither…*"[2]

MADOG WAS A PIECE IN THE ENGLISH AND SPANISH GAME OF COLONIAL CHESS

Whatever Madog's origins, by the 16th century he had taken on a very definite guise. He was a piece – at times, a surprisingly important one – in the game of colonial chess that the English and Spanish were playing over the board of North America. And English writers – among them Elizabeth's court magician John Dee – were much enamoured of Madog because he allowed them to put in a pre-Columbian claim to 'British' America.

For all that the Middle Ages were supposed to have ended in 1492, some typically mediæval views on the rights of land going not to the inhabitants – or to the strong – but to the discoverer, continued well into the early modern period. If this were all, then the Welsh evidence would have to be discounted *en masse*. However, by great good fortune, there are three pieces of evidence – the following – that cannot be so easily disposed of because they all date to the years and, in one case, the centuries before Columbus:

- A 12th-century poem by Cynddelw Brydydd Mawr describes a certain Madog who was part of Owen of Gwynedd's retinue (*teulu*). Owen of Gwynedd was an important Welsh king of that era who ruled in the north-west of the peninsula.

- A 15th-century poem by Maredudd ap Rhys recalls Madog. Maredudd has been

given a fishing net and thanks his patron, who is a hunter. Maredudd, however, is "a Madoc of my age", loving the sea over the land. According to Maredudd, Madog was a 'whelp' (*cenau*: that could mean either son or a loyal henchman) of Owen of Gwynedd.

A 15th-century poem by Deio ab Ieuan Du refers to Madog as the son of Owen of Gwynedd and hints at legends about adventures at sea. Deio draws a parallel with the Welsh Lord of Tywyn who has been recently captured by pirates.

THE STONE RECORDS THAT MADOG SET OFF ON A GREAT ADVENTURE

The *Madogwys* and the dry-as-dusters – the 'serious' historians who would eat their chalky mortar boards rather than believe in Welsh Indians – have scrapped energetically over these three references, and both sides have resorted to foul play. There was an inventive but naughty attempt by a *Madogwys* to insert "ocean" into the 12th-century poem. (William Owen-Pughe, the *Madogwys* in question, emended the Welsh word for wall (*mur*) to the Welsh word for seas (*myr*) [3]

The dry-as-dusters have done their best to write off these entries, insisting that they "in all probability, referred to another Madog". But neither have had their own way; the manipulation of the poem has been rightly rejected, while the claim about "another Madog" is similarly nonsensical. Madog was, it is true, not an unknown name in mediæval Wales, especially in land-locked Powys. But these poems stand indubitably together; two of them connect a certain Madog to the sea, and all three relate this individual to a mediæval Welsh king, Owen of Gwynedd. This Madog is our Madog.

In fact, most investigators of the legend have been so caught up in special pleading that no one has noticed quite how remarkable these references are, especially the two 15th-century ones. These later poems allude to, rather than tell the story of, Madog, and their very vagueness is striking. In communicating allusively, the poets obviously counted on their audience knowing the legend well. And while we do not know what this invisible but palpable legend said, we can be sure it was concerned with a folk hero, Madog, who had something to do with the sea.

These two poems also give us some idea of the breadth of the legend by the 15th century. Madog is associated, one way or another, with Owein of Gwynedd (north-western Wales), so it is no surprise to hear Maredudd – a clergyman poet who lived in what was anciently Gwynedd – referring to the legend. But Deio ab Ieuan Du lived in Cardigan, in the south-west of the principality. If we make the quite justifiable assumption that the legend was well known in these two regions – and, rather more daringly, in the lands in between – then the legend covered most of mediæval Wales.

To add to this strong initial evidence we have, unfortunately, to turn to sources that are far less trustworthy; that is, evidence that is either post-Columbus or that comes from elsewhere in Europe. The four most quoted of these other references are the following:

The triad of "the three complete losses of the Island of Britain". Welsh knowledge was traditionally recorded in triads (collections of three); for example, "the three lovers of Britain". However, this triad, which mentions Madog and a great voyage on the ocean, is an 18th-century forgery from the pen of Iolo Morganwyg, a self-made scholar who, while extremely knowledgeable in the "ancient matter of Britain", had no scruples about 'enhancing' mediæval survivals. Does this forgery perhaps contain genuine pre-1492 Welsh lore?

The Lundy Stone. There is a record of an ancient inscription that turned up on a piece of granite shipped from the isle of Lundy in 1865. The shipment arrived in Barnstaple, Devon, and the stone was found there. This stone, in a brief sentence in Welsh, records that Madog set off from the island on a great adventure. The words on the stone contains no material that allows us to date it.

Madog in Bardsey Sound. In 1582, the Welsh writer Roger Morris set himself the task of explaining a local place-name: *Ffydiau Caswennan* (the dangerous currents off Bardsey island). To do so, he refers to a legend about Madog. It seems that Madog's ship *Gwennan Corn* – with deer's antlers tied to its bow, to stop the sea swallowing it – was thought invulnerable and had proved its worth in many foreign voyages. However, on entering the Ffydiau Caswennan (the Currents of the Bain of Gwennan) it almost sank.

Willelm the Fleming. Willelm was a 13th-century Dutch-speaking poet whose masterpiece and only surviving work is *Reynard the Fox*. However, he also wrote another work named Madoc. Willelm himself refers to Madoc in the prologue to *Reynard*, as does another 13th-century writer, Jacob Van Maerlant.

The first two of these sources can be disposed of very quickly. The triad of Iolo contains genuine mediæval lore, but the information on Madog is found in no other early source. It is, however, close to the English Elizabethan material. Iolo was, in fact, an enthusiastic *Madogwys*.

The 'stone of Lundy' was described in a letter sent by a certain M Jones to the Madog specialist Richard Deacon, who had never seen the rock.[4] If it ever existed, it is evidently now lost. Deacon claimed that it is unlikely to have been carved later than the 14th century. In fact, its language is unconvincing and the way it expresses itself would be paralleled only with difficulty in other mediæval Welsh carving. I suggest that, if it does ever turn up, its letters will be found to be suspiciously close to the measure of a modern or 19th-century chisel.

The last two sources may, however, be genuinely relevant to Madog. It is the lack of any mention of America in Roger Morris' brief description that makes one think that this is a mediæval legend that has survived into the 16th century. There is also the Welsh feel to the story, especially the onomastic purpose of the tale; ie. it explains a place-name.[5]

The fourth source, meanwhile, is arguably more exciting than even the pre-Columbian Welsh poems. The two 13th-century references are absolutely impeccable. Willelm definitely wrote a work about someone called Madog. What is not apparent is whether this Madog was our Madog. However, the chances are high; as we have already seen there were several mediæval Welsh individuals with that name. But Madog the sea-hero is the only Madog who makes an appearance in Welsh folklore. It seems, then, probable that Willelm did, indeed, borrow a Welsh legend and turn it to his own purposes, like so

many other continental writers in this period.

Perhaps Willelm lived in, or had contacts in, the 'Little Holland' in south central Wales, an area settled by large numbers of Flemmings after the Norman invasion. So great was this settlement that Flemish was spoken in this area in the 14th century and the Flemmings left Germanic traces in the modern genetic make-up of the area which can still be detected today.[6]

There is a strange, modern adjunct to the story of Willelm's poem. In 1966, Deacon claimed that Willelm's Madog had turned up in a mediæval French manuscript in the form of a *précis*. The manuscript allegedly told how Madog with his sea-nymph wife (who wore stockings made of fish nets – inevitable puns follow) went off into the ocean in search of the Fountain of Youth. They found this fountain and returned there to set up a colony based on the precepts of peace and love.

This story is supposed to have surfaced in a 14th-century manuscript. Deacon's only source for this are personal letter(s) from a French scholar named Larguier, whose speciality was supposedly mediæval French poetry. There is no record of such a scholar in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, and I wonder if Deacon was perhaps not the victim of a hoax. It is almost unthinkable that a French poem or text was found in a 14th-century manuscript and that it remained unprinted as late as 1966, never mind 2002.

It must also be said that several of the points in the *précis* are suspicious – mediæval details braided with more modern preoccupations. The Fountain of Youth, for example, could be a twisted example of something we already have in Welsh lore, but the island of peace and love has a flower-power feel to it. Deacon, remember, published in the decade of flares and long hair. However, even this dubious reference can be turned to good use. Let's give Monsieur Larguier the benefit of the doubt. Let's, in effect, stretch the Welsh and Continental evidence to its very limit. Tomorrow, a bulky 14th-century manuscript turns up in a wardrobe in Llandudno and in said manuscript we find Willelm's description of how Madog's crew – wife, fish nets and all – journeyed out to sea and there discovered an island, subsequently bringing word back to Gwynedd of this paradise in the ocean.

How would the news of this manuscript be received by experts? Well, obviously the interest would be enormous – new manuscripts only very rarely come to light. But it has also to be said that its contents would not cause as much surprise as Deacon seems to believe. In fact, the real surprise would be if there were *no* tales about strange islands in the now lost Madog legend. After all, other Atlantic peoples of Europe – the Irish, the Cornish, the Bretons, and the Galicians – all have mediæval tales about a hero who goes off to sea and finds marvellous islands. Madog seems to be the Welsh reflex of this wider Atlantic (Celtic?) legend, a folk-hero from Gwynedd in the mould of Brendan (Ireland), of Malo (Breton), of Pedrog (Cornwall) and others. In other words a historical character has fallen into a constricting, mythical role. We must not confuse what he does in legend with what he did in history.

The *Madoguys* will not take this lying down – how could they? They will protest that at times history and myth overlap. For example, the *Navigatio* of Brendan is said by some to point to an Irish discovery of America in the sixth century. However, the differences between Brendan and Madog are instructive. Brendan's *Navigatio* has credible details about Irish voyages in the North Atlantic and perhaps off the coast of North America – whether by Brendan or someone else we do not know. But there is nothing in the little that has survived of the Madog myth – nor in what later British writers tell us about Madog – that has even a hint of real knowledge; frankly, we cannot even speak of 'details'. The closest we get to the authentic flavour of the Welsh legend is probably Roger Morris' 16th-century account of Madog's adventures in Bardsey Sound – a magical boat with antlers. Whereas some treat Brendan's *Navigatio* as a kind of mediæval version of *National Geographic*, the little we know of Madog suggests, rather, a blurred and slightly surreal Disney cartoon.

THE ISLAND OF PEACE AND LOVE HAS A FLOWER-POWER FEEL TO IT

Of course, none of this is to say that an individual named Madog – son, bastard or henchman of Owen of Gwynedd – did not earn a reputation as a sailor in the 12th century. Nor does it mean that this individual, by accident or inspiration, did not make a land fall in America. There is absolutely nothing inherently impossible about either of these points. You could even argue that, for a 12th-century Welsh man to so capture the imagination of his people that he entered legend – and the historical originals of most Welsh folkloric heroes lived in the fifth, sixth and seventh centuries – he would have had to have done something extraordinary.

Fair enough; argument accepted. But in that case, one further point must also be admitted: if Madog were ever a historical individual, then he had clearly slipped into the sticky, suffocating amber of myth by the time he appears in the 15th-century Welsh poems, the most substantial evidence that we have. The very best that this late and plainly unhistorical Welsh material can do is to ask a question: did Madog perhaps reach America?

The answer will come not from Europe but from the ethnographic, linguistic and archæological data gathered in the New World which is said to point to the existence of a mediæval Welsh colony there. *Madoguys* may find inspiration, hints and curious interrogatives in the Welsh side of the legend, but they will not find proof. FT

NOTES

1 Gwyn A Williams, *Madog: The Making of a Myth* (London 1979), pp45-6.

2 For Iolo in general Prys Morgan Iolo Morganwg (Cardiff 1956).

3 E D Jones 'The Reputed Discovery of America by Madoc' *National Library of Wales Journal 14* (1965).

4 Lauran Toorians 'Wizo Flandrensis and the Flemish Settlement in Permbrokeshire' *Cambridge Mediæval Celtic Studies 20* (Winter 1990), 99-118.

5 Richard Deacon, Madoc and the Discovery of America (London 1966), p168.

6 Present author. ***FT151:40*** (Oct 2001).

IN NEXT MONTH'S FORTEAN TIMES, IN PART TWO OF HIS ARTICLE, SIMON YOUNG WILL EXPLORE THE LEGEND OF A WELSH-SPEAKING INDIAN TRIBE SUPPOSEDLY DESCENDED FROM MADOG'S CREW.

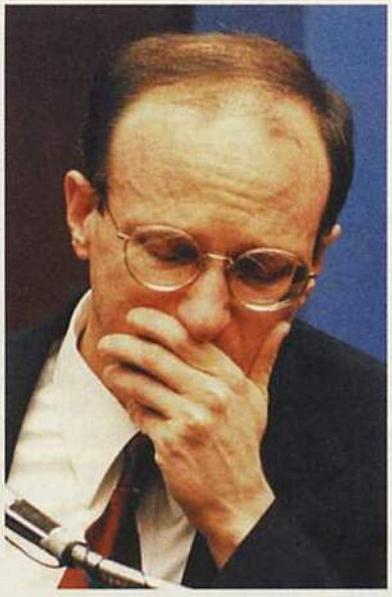
◆ AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Simon Young has a long-standing interest in Celtic mediæval history and especially the early travels of the British Celts and Irish. His latest work *Britonia: caminos novos* was published in 2002. At the moment he is to be found in Florence, Italy, surrounded by lots of books.

the big Sleep

Could a man who drives across town and beats his mother-in-law to death, or stabs his wife 26 times, possibly be sleepwalking? And should this be seen as a valid legal defence? WILLIAM JACOBS examines the recent case of sleepwalking murderer Scott Falater and those of earlier deadly somnambulists. Illustration by THOMAS BARWICK.

Police found Yasmin's body floating face down in the swimming pool



AP PHOTO/JEFF TOPPING

EYES WIDE SHUT: Scott Falater in court.

Late on the night of January 16 1997, Greg Koons was awakened by the sound of screaming. Peeking over his backyard fence, he saw his neighbour, Yarmilla Falater, lying by her swimming pool covered in blood. He watched, shocked, as her husband, Scott, dragged her to the pool and held her head under the water. Koons ran inside to call the police.

Officers arrived to find Yarmilla Falater's body floating face down in the pool's shallow end. Glimpsing movement inside the house, they entered through unlocked patio doors. There, they found Scott Falater, dressed in his pyjamas, bleary-eyed and confused. His arm and neck were stained with blood, but he was unable to say where it had come from, why the police were there or where his wife was.

A police investigation determined that Yarmilla Falater had been stabbed 44 times with a hunting knife. They found Scott Falater's bloody clothes and knife stored neatly in his garage. Falater was arrested and charged with his wife's murder.

What could lead this deeply religious, mild-mannered, teetotal, seemingly devoted husband and father to brutally kill his wife? His defence was what the courts call "non-insane automatism". In other words: sleepwalking.

Falater's claim lies at the borders of the possible. While his actions that night showed many of the characteristics of sleepwalking, they stretched the limits of how long, how complicated and how purposeful sleep activity can be. If Falater really was sleepwalking, it was the most extraordinary case ever recorded.

The common conception of a sleepwalker is a person with arms outstretched, wandering through a house insensible to his or her surroundings. This is not far from the truth, but only for the common childhood form of the sleep disorder. For the rarer cases of adult sleepwalking, the picture is somewhat different. Adult sleepwalkers can perform surprisingly complex activities including walking on rooftops and driving in traffic. In two different forms of the disorder, sleepwalkers are either acting out their dreams or performing activities they had been thinking about

NOT GUILTY: SLEEPWALKING TO FREEDOM

In 1982, an earlier example of a sleepwalking murder case came before the Arizona courts. The previous year, Steven Steinberg, of Scotsdale, Arizona, killed his wife, Elena, with a kitchen knife, stabbing her 26 times. During his trial – at Maricopa County Superior Court, where Falater would find himself some years later – Steinberg claimed he had been sleepwalking when he killed his wife, and could not be considered 'sane' at the time. Psychiatrist Dr Martin Blinder testified that Steinberg had committed the murder in a state of "dissociative reaction". Steinberg's plea of "not guilty" was accepted by the jury, who found him innocent and let him leave the court a free man.

The case of Ken Parks also offers parallels with that of Scott Falater, especially in terms of the complexity of the acts the sleepwalking Parks carried out. On the night of May 24, 1987, Parks drove 22 km to his in-laws' home on the outskirts of Toronto, Canada. There he throttled his father-in-law unconscious, beat his mother-in-law with a tire iron and stabbed her to death with a kitchen knife. A team of expert defence witnesses – including psychiatrists, a psychologist, a neurologist and a sleep specialist – concluded that Parks carried out the attacks during an episode of "non-insane somnambulism". Parks' long history of sleepwalking, good relationships with his in-laws, and consistent story under intense questioning convinced the jury to find him not guilty.

sleep. Falater's neighbour, Koons, testified to what he saw: Falater hushed his barking dog and put a sticking plaster on a cut.

Even more damning, his actions showed logic and intention; Falater went to the garage to find a matched pair of gloves before dragging Yarmilla's body to the pool and removed and stored his bloody clothing. Finally, they say the events lasted far too long. Sleepwalking episodes are usually brief, lasting from seconds to a half hour. Falater, they estimate, took 50 minutes to kill his wife and change his clothes. He must have been awake.

The defence counters that Falater's actions were characteristic of sleepwalking; they only made "semi-sense". He hid his bloody clothes, but didn't wash them. He put on a sticking plaster, but didn't wash the blood off his hands. He left Yarmilla's body floating in the pool, put on his pyjamas and went back to bed. This, they say, is the dream-logic of sleepwalking, incorporating and transforming everyday activities.

Following the panic of his night terror, Dr. Cartwright says, Falater fell into a period of "confusual arousal". This confused, half-logical state, also known as sleep drunkenness, can last up to 90 minutes and allows for more complex thought than sleepwalking. Falater, she says, stumbled through cleaning up and putting away his tools. Falater's neighbour described Falater's motions as "robot-like", inappropriate for a sleepwalker, but an apt description of someone in "confusual arousal".

Finishing his tasks, Falater put on his pajamas and returned to bed, falling rapidly back into normal sleep. At this stage, the final characteristic of the sleepwalking episode sets in: amnesia. Falater says he can remember nothing of the night until awakened by the police.

After a month of testimony, the jury deliberated for only eight hours. The verdict: guilty. While the prosecution's expert witnesses believe that the jury was convinced by their arguments, Falater feels they were confused by the prosecution's distortion of facts, particularly a conversation Falater had with a co-worker about the Parks case that the prosecution claimed took place weeks before Yarmilla's murder. However, Juror Theresa Beaubien, interviewed afterwards, said only that she felt Falater accepted his wife's death too easily.

Today, Scott Falater remains in prison awaiting a petition of post-conviction relief of his sentence. He has distanced himself from his defence, claiming that, having no memories of that night, he doesn't know whether he was sleepwalking or not. And if he doesn't know, how can any of us? FT

◆ AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

William Jacobs is journalist and documentary researcher based in New York. He specialises in forteana, science and general weirdness.

guilty due to insanity can include requirements for committal to a hospital for reasons of public safety, but non-insane automatism is a full acquittal.

This distinction had caused difficulties in many cases as medical opinion on the possibility of the recurrence of sleep violence, treatment of sleepwalking and the definition of a "defect of mind" – required for insanity – have changed over the years. This has led to many appeals and overturned verdicts as judges wrestle with vague and contradictory previous rulings.

In 1991, the Court of Appeal in R v Burgess reclassified violence during sleepwalking as insanity in the UK primarily, according to analysis by Irene Mackay in the *Modern Law Review* (Vol 55, p714), for reasons of social defence, forcing Burgess to seek treatment for his sleepwalking.

Perhaps the most famous sleepwalking murderer is Robert Ledru. His story has been cited in numerous news reports and law journal articles on somnambulism and turns up frequently in collections of fortean tales. Ledru was a Parisian detective sent to the vacation resort of Le Havre in 1888 to recover from overwork and exhaustion and help the local constabulary investigate a series of disappearances. One morning during his stay, he was called out to the scene of a murder on a local beach. André Monet, a vacationing Parisian businessman, had been shot. At the scene, Ledru found a blurred footprint and a spent bullet. Ledru was shocked to discover that the footprint matched his own right foot with his distinctive missing toe. This perhaps explained the wet sandy socks he had found himself wearing upon awakening. Ledru checked his Luger and found that it had been fired. After a test-fire produced a matching bullet, Ledru had no choice but to turn himself in, famously confessing, "I have the killer and the evidence, but I lack the motive. It was I who killed André Monet." Ledru was acquitted, but ordered by the court to sleep in locked rooms for the rest of life.

Unfortunately for the lover of good stories, Ledru probably never existed. Brian McConnell investigated the story and presented his findings at the 14th Annual Conference of the International Society for Contemporary Legend Research in 1996. Searches of records of Ledru's traditionally stated birth and death years (1853 and 1937) turned up no traces of the man. Nor did a search of the Le Havre municipal records by archivist Sylvie Bonet find any reference to André Monet. Further, in 1888, any men sent to help a series of local crimes would have come from France's national police force, the Sûreté rather than the Parisian police.

REFERENCE: 'The French Detective myth', Brian McConnell, *New Law Journal*, 25 Oct 1996 p1562.

Bain versus Pflock

Donald Bain, friend of Long John Nebel and author of *The CIA's Control of Candy Jones*, takes issue with Karl Pflock's recent debunking of the Candy Jones story (***FT165:44***).

AS THE AUTHOR OF THE CONTROL OF CANDY JONES (RECENTLY reissued as *The CIA's Control of Candy Jones*), I was naturally interested to see that *Fortean Times* was running an article by someone named Karl Pflock arguing that the book is essentially a hoax. I looked forward to a negative take on Candy's story that was at least worthy of serious debate, but after reading Pflock's quarter-inch deep and dishonest piece, I realised there was no need to brace myself for an intellectual challenge.

Pflock accuses the book of being a fiction, a commercial scheme conjured by Candy Jones's deceased husband, radio broadcasting legend Long John Nebel, one of my dearest friends. It's easy, and small, to vilify the dead. Then again, history is rife with small people envious of those who've achieved greater things in their lives.

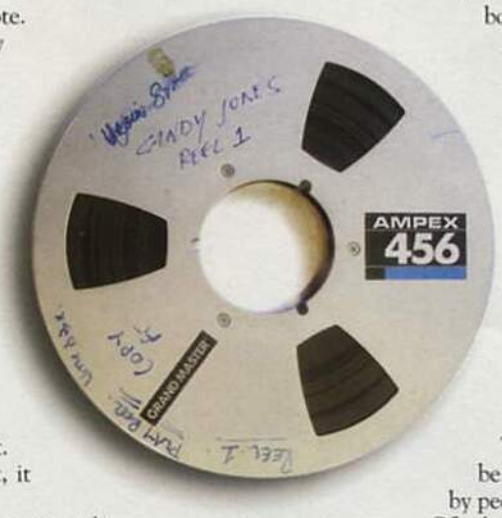
Let's begin by examining the *real* writer of fiction, Karl Pflock.

He claims to have had a relationship with Sanford "Sandy" Teller,* perhaps Nebel's best friend and certainly one of mine for many years. Pflock claims to have "used" Sandy to get things from Long John, and actually has the gall to quote him. When, allegedly, Pflock asked about the Candy Jones book, Sandy is reported as having said: "It's [the book] a crock of shit!"

I called Sandy and told him about the quote. His response: "Not only have I never said any such thing, but I don't know anyone named Karl Pflock; never even heard of him."*

Anne Lombardo, a Nebel listener since the 1950s and his producer from June 1967 until John's death in April, 1978, is someone who knew *everything* about John's life, his circle of friends and show guests. She tells me that she, too, has never heard of a Karl Pflock.

Pflock's hatchet job on the book is based upon his own peculiar and skewed brand of reasoning. In claiming to have had his conversation with Sandy Teller, Pflock states that Sandy went on to say that he would deny having made such a comment. Pflock's sophisticated logic: if Sandy denies it, it must mean it's true!*



Because Long John Nebel loved a good put-on, and came up with some wonderful ones during his long career on radio, Pflock assumes that, by extension, the Candy Jones book must be a put-on, too. He ignores the fact that John devoted most of his career to probing myriad serious and important subjects on the air. He interviewed hundreds of prominent political figures, industry leaders and icons of the entertainment business. Little in his distinguished career could be called a put-on, and *The Control of Candy Jones* certainly wasn't.

Pflock quotes Nebel's former producer, Paris Flammonde, as claiming he walked away from the book because it offended his sense of journalistic integrity. Nonsense! John told me on more than one occasion that Flammonde was angry at not having been given a chance to write the Candy Jones story.

Pflock claims to have become close to Candy following Nebel's death,* appearing on her show, and even driving her home after it. That may be. We all stopped listening the minute John died. But Pflock adds to his rickety thesis when he writes that, when asked about the book, Candy said she had little recollection of the events at the heart of the story – which remarkably "proves" to Pflock that it must have been untrue. None of this would be quite so dismaying if Pflock understood how someone with Candy Jones' unique level of hypnotisability could have been manipulated not only to carry out assignments for her handlers, but also to be programmed not to remember them.

The book is more than a primer on mind control and the science behind it

The book is much more than a chronicle of Candy's wrenching personal story. It serves as a primer on mind control and the science behind it. Pflock's attack on the book ignores the wealth of hard-nosed, scientifically solid material it contains, based upon the work of leading scientists and physicians, and documented in other case histories.

Pflock questions the very existence of the 200 hours of tape upon which I based the book, and actually challenges me to "cough them up." For you, Mr Pflock? Don't delude yourself. Portions of the tapes were played on radio and television programmes across the country when Candy and I toured to promote the book. And John Marks, a serious investigator of mind control and manipulation mentioned in Pflock's article, spent a day with me in my office listening to them. The tapes exist, Mr Pflock, and are secure – to be listened to another day, and for other reasons, by people more qualified than you.

Pflock claims to have worked for the CIA and State Department in some capacities, which I don't have evidence to dispute. If so, he's but one of many thousands of men and women who point to such a background as proof of their credibility. I disagree. On the contrary, such credentials hardly serve to establish veracity. Has Pflock's attack on the book, with its bumbling conclusions, been carried out at the behest of his former employers? If so, the CIA ought to reevaluate its criteria for choosing spokespeople.

Fortunately, a book such as *The CIA's Control of Candy Jones* exists to shed needed light on the callous mistreatment of American citizens by their own government. Its re-publication will bring that truth to a new generation of readers.

I'm proud to have written it.

* [Editors' note: Mr Bain seems to have forgotten that Pflock was actually quoting Jim Moseley. It was Moseley, not Pflock, who claims to have known Candy Jones and to have spoken to Sandy Teller.]

DONALD BAIN has written more than 80 fiction and non-fiction books, produced and written films and radio series, lectured at college, and been a jazz musician and critic.

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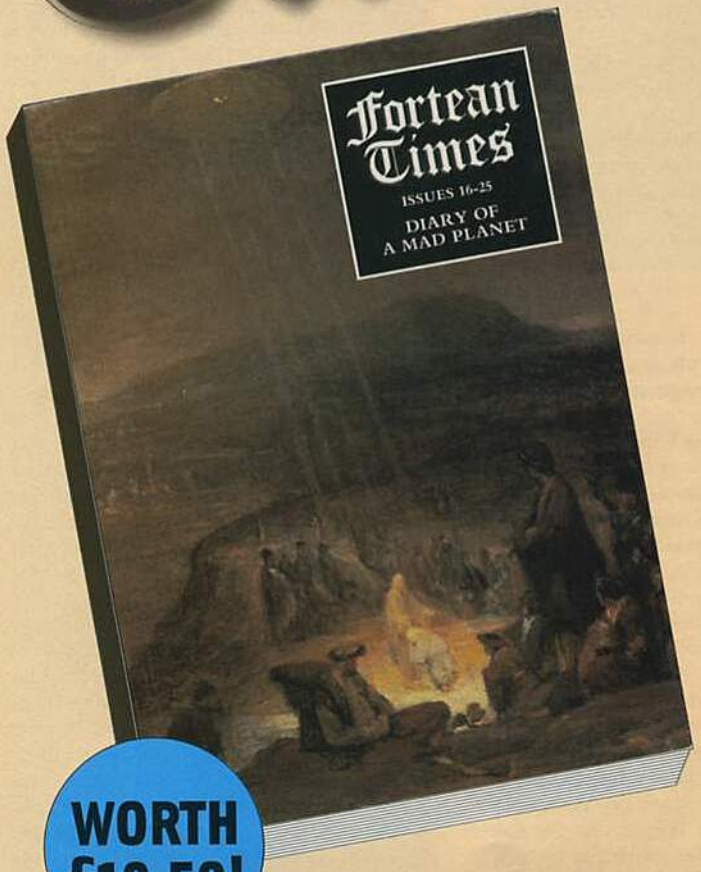

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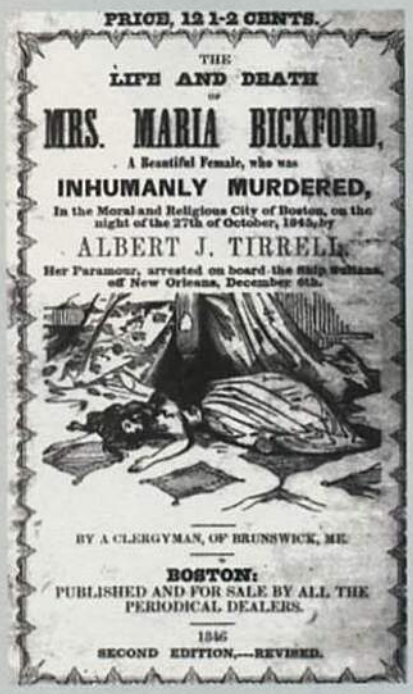
SLEEPWALKING AND THE LAW

SCOTT FALATER'S CASE IS AN UNUSUAL ONE, BUT HE IS BY NO MEANS THE FIRST MURDERER TO USE SLEEPWALKING AS A DEFENCE IN THE COURTS.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In the Moral and Religious City of Boston, on the night of the 27th of October, 1845, by
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1846
SECOND EDITION,---REVISED.

Sleepwalking has been used successfully as a defence in murder, assault and rape cases for over 150 years. The legal precedent was set in 1846 in the Boston, Massachusetts, case of The People v Tirrell. Albert Tirrell was charged with the murder of Maria Bickford, a prostitute with whom he was having an affair, and the arson of her brothel. Tirrell hired Boston's most famous lawyer, Rufus Choate, who argued that Tirrell wasn't criminally responsible of a crime committed during sleep. Choate was quoted in the *Boston Daily Times* as arguing, "He was unquestionably in the Somnambulic state – circumstances and evidence show it. If he is proved to be a Somnambulist, he must be acquitted." Tirrel was found not guilty.

In the UK, the earliest mention of the sleepwalking defence to be found is in the 1889 volume of the Queen's Bench Division of Law Reports. There Stephen J wrote: "can anyone doubt that a man who, though he might be perfectly sane, committed what would otherwise be a crime in a state of somnambulism, would be entitled to be acquitted? And why is this? Simply because he would not know what he was doing." J is placing sleepwalking in the category of non-insane automatism along with crimes committed during concussion and reflex or muscle spasms. These are distinguished from the insanity defence. A ruling of not before going to bed – often tasks planned for the following day.

Falater's defence is not that he intended to murder his wife the next morning. The hunting knife, the jury was told, was to pry open a malfunctioning pool pump Falater had attempted unsuccessfully to fix earlier that day. The police had, in fact, found a lit torch by the pump along with a puddle of Yarmilla Falater's blood. In the defence's scenario, Yarmilla woke, noticed her husband gone, and found him by the pool. Then, by interrupting him, she triggered him into a horrific new state called a night terror.

Night terrors are a sleep state closely connected to sleepwalking. In a night terror a sleeper awakens suddenly, often from a sleepwalk, disoriented and terrified, screaming and punching. The sleeper's outbursts may indicate that he is hallucinating or has mistaken a bed-partner for an intruder. This could be the origin of the tradition that it is dangerous to wake a sleepwalker: it's not dangerous for them; it's dangerous for you.

The response to night terrors is usually limited to wildly flailing about, but if a weapon is handy, the episode can turn deadly. This is what the defence claims happened that night in the Falaters' yard.

It is not a novel idea. Interrupted sleepwalking has been used successfully as a defence in murder, assault and rape cases in the US, Canada, and the UK on many occasions (see panel). In the US and Canada, the legal argument rests on the lack of criminal intent. Acts committed during sleepwalking are considered unconscious and involuntary – hence the term "automatism".

In most of these cases, the sleepwalker's activities don't approach the level of complexity of Falater's that night. An exception is the case of Ken Parks, whose actions while apparently sleepwalking certainly surpass those of Falater (see panel on facing page).

PHOENIX POLICE DEPARTMENT

He had a history of childhood sleepwalking

Parks' expert witness, Dr Roger Broughton, was brought in by Falater's lawyers. Along with Dr Nancy Cartwright, head of the sleep clinic at Rush Presbyterian Hospital in Chicago, Illinois, they developed the basis for the defence's case. The first requirement was to establish that Falater could have been sleepwalking that night. He did, it transpired, have a history of childhood sleepwalking. At his trial, his sister described one particularly pertinent event that had occurred 20 years previously. Late one night she accosted her brother as he, dressed in his pajamas, headed for an outside door. When he didn't answer, she tried to reach around him to lock the door before he could get out. He turned around, grabbed her by the shoulders and tossed her across the room. She later recalled his expression as angry, almost demonic. But in the morning, he couldn't remember a thing.

At his trial, Falater described more recent episodes when he would awaken on the floor or the couch with no memory of how he got there. Sleepwalking can be triggered by the use of drugs, caffeine or alcohol; stress; and lack of sleep. In January 1997, Falater was suffering from all three. The project he managed at his job was failing. He was working long hours trying to keep up with work and getting up early to teach a daily class on the side. He had begun to take caffeine pills. To get hard evidence of his sleepwalking, Falater went to St Luke's Medical Centre in Phoenix, Arizona, to be tested. There he was hooked up to a polysomnograph. For four nights, sleep researchers measured his brainwaves as he slept, looking for telltale clues of sleepwalking.

During a night's rest, a sleeper passes several times from shallow to deep sleep and back again. Changes take place in our brains and our bodies over the course of the cycle. In shallow sleep, we dream, but our bodies are paralysed. In deep sleep, we see no visions, but are free to toss and turn. Sleepwalking occurs when the transitions between these stages of sleep malfunction. Normal sleepers in the deepest stage of sleep produce a particular pattern of brainwaves known as Delta waves. Sleepwalkers can't sustain Delta waves for long. Instead, they shift abruptly out of deep sleep 30 or more times in a night. Also, just before that sudden arousal, a sleepwalker's normally chaotic Delta-waves become briefly "hyper-synchronised", moving across the brain in lockstep for three or four waves. These were the two markers the lab looked for in Falater's brainwaves, but their results were inconclusive; they didn't see evidence that Falater even reached deep sleep on those nights. Dr Cartwright disagreed; in her own analysis of Falater's recorded brainwaves she saw clear evidence of hyper-synchronisation.

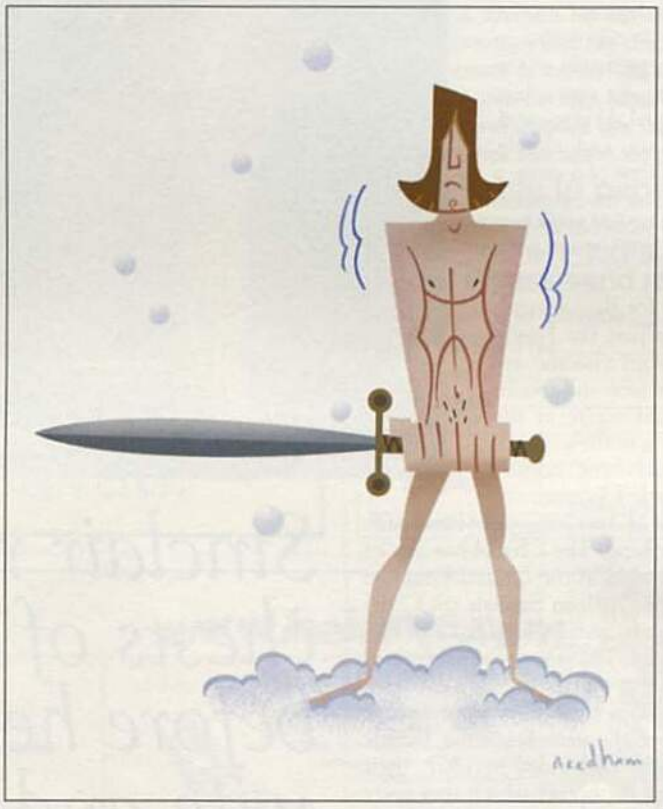
While Cartwright's analysis shows that Falater may still sleepwalk, it doesn't prove he was doing so that night. As the prosecution's expert witnesses, Drs Mark Pressman and David Baretz, told the court, Falater's actions were too complex to have taken place during

No time to grab your pants, but wouldn't be seen dead without a blade?

body still warm; he was taken to a hospital, where he recovered completely.[6]

Immortals, especially if preparing for a duel, would surely be seen carrying swords about the place. Sword wielding men, in fact, appear in the newspapers with disturbing frequency; but it is an odd coincidence that many of them are rather underdressed. Not enough time to grab your pants, but wouldn't be caught dead without a blade? An example is the naked man who walked in to the Big Apple store in Portland, Maine, during a snowstorm on 22 March 1997, a carrying a 1m (3ft) double-edged sword.[7]

Other incidents have had extremely serious outcomes; such as the occasion in July 2001, when a schizophrenic ran amok with a samurai sword near his home in Wavertree, Liverpool. Two psychiatric nurses, sent to calm him, left after he threatened to chop off their heads. He was extremely agitated and, when he refused to drop the sword, he was shot twice in the chest and died.[8]



DAVE NEEDHAM

Genuine Immortalist sword fights would inevitably end in decapitation. When the head leaves the neck, it's over! News reports about such murders give many reasons why the heads of the victims are removed; sometimes it is to hide the identity of the deceased but often it is inspired by sheer rage. *FT*'s files bulge with reports of such attacks and discoveries of headless bodies, such as the one found in a tube tunnel near Leytonstone station, London, in October 1998, wearing a black T-shirt with white lettering saying "Have a very bad day".[9]

At the conclusion of an Immortal duel, there is a spectacular phenomenon – the Quickening. Why does no one report sightings of victorious Immortals, perhaps waving swords above their heads in triumph? Now, lightning is a very fortean phenomenon and so common that it would be easy to overlook the occasional Quickening. Perhaps the light show itself helps to camouflage the origins of all that energy? If the air is full of lightning bolts and everything is exploding around you, you don't stop to take notes. Another possible reason is that many survivors of lightning and electrical injuries actually seem to experience altered consciousness, confusion, disorientation and amnesia – and perhaps even schizophrenic delusions – for a short while. Subsequently *sequelæ* range from headaches and distractibility to persistent psychiatric disorder and dementia.[10] Perhaps being that close to a Quickening induces amnesia in witnesses who then forget the Immortal at the centre of the storm.

But the main purpose of a Quickening is not the light show, but the transfer of power. Could this be what happened to Greta Alexander from Illinois, who claimed her psychic powers arrived after she was struck by lightning? Later, she gained national attention for helping police find missing people and bodies, saying she could visualise the past, see the future, and describe events happening 100 miles (160km) away.[11]

Of course, while we possess a wealth of examples of foundlings, returns from the grave, miraculous escapes, healings, decapitations, swordsmen, and many sorts of lightning accidents, they do not conclusively point to the reality of our Immortals. We really need a good, single case that combines most or all of these signs; fortunately I have one; and it definitely definitely predates TV. Written in Sanskrit, sometime between 400 BC and AD 200, the *Mahabharata*, the chief epic of Hinduism, tells of the death of Sisupala, a minor character. Krishna forgave him 100 offences, honouring an earlier pact; however, when Sisupala commits his 101st offence, Krishna is merciless:

[Krishna said] "This present offence I can no longer forbear, and his insolence amidst the full circle of kings deserves death..." But when Sisupala heard it, the mighty man burst into loud laughter and jeeringly said, "Have you no shame at all Krishna... For what self-respecting man but you would broadcast to the strict that his wife had belonged to another, [Krishna]? Forgive me, if you have that much faith, or don't, Krishna, what could possibly befall me from you, however angry or friendly?" He was speaking when the blessed [Krishna], scourge of his enemies, irately cut off his head with his discus. The strong-armed king fell like a tree that is struck by a thunderbolt. Thereupon the kings watched a sublime radiance rise forth from the body of the king of the Cedis, which, great king, was like the sun rising up from the sky; and that radiance greeted lotus-eyed Krishna, honoured by the world, and entered him. When they saw that, all the kings deemed it a miracle that that radiance entered the strong-armed man, that greatest of men. In a cloudless sky heaven rained forth and blazing lightning struck and the earth trembled, when Krishna slew the Caidya.[12]

A challenge, a death by decapitation and a Quickening. As the Immortal Ramirez says: "From the dawn of time We came... moving silently down through the centuries... living many secret lives... struggling to reach the time of the Gathering, when the few who remain will battle to the last. No one has ever known we were among you... until now."

BECCAELIZABETH spends most of her time on the web, working on graphics or writing a novel. Some of her work can be found on her web site – www.geocities.com/beccaelizabeth/. At *Highlander* conventions, she's the one in red wearing a sword.

NOTES

1 *www.denverpost.com*, 15 Sept 1999.
2 *Expressen* (Sweden), 13+15 May 1999.
3 ***FT138:08***; *Irish Independent*, 3 June 2000.
4 ***FT140:09***; *D.Telegraph*, 16 Mar 2000.
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6 Jan Bondeson, 'Buried Alive' in ***FT146:34***
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10 Margaret Primeau, Geroit H Engelstatter & and Kimberly K Bares: 'Behavioral consequences of lightning and electrical injury', *Seminars in Neurology*, V15, No.3, Sept 1995. See also: *Behavioral consequences of lightning and electrical injury* (www.uic.edu:80/~macooper/psycho.html).
11 ***FT115:10***; *AP*, 19 July 1998.
12 *Mahabharata* 2:42.14-25. Thanks to AC MacFru who first found this reference. See her site – www.astrochick.com/ – for more details.

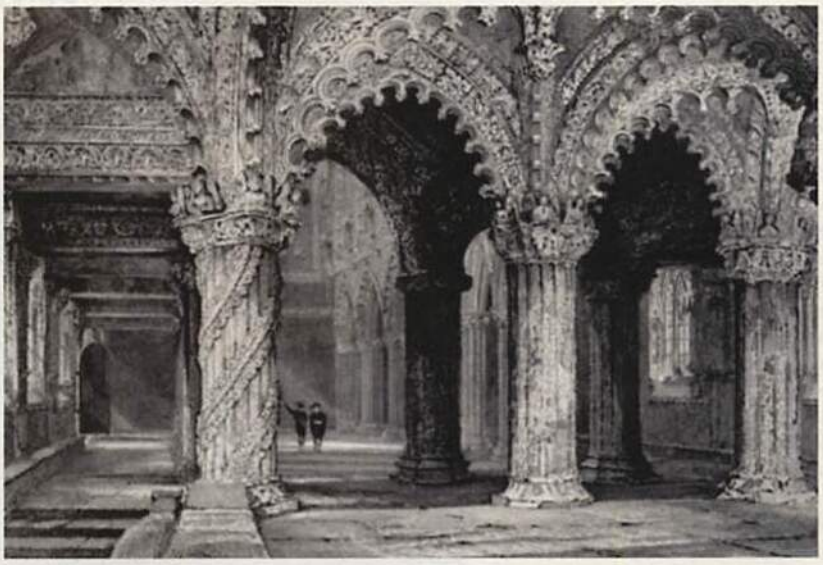
Templar treasures

Gordon Rutter visits Rosslyn Chapel, purported treasure trove of the Knights Templar and Scotland's answer to Rennes-le-Château.

SIX AND A HALF MILES (10KM) SOUTH-EAST OF Edinburgh lies the small village of Roslin, famous for two things: it's the home of Dolly the Sheep and Rosslyn Chapel, supposedly the Templar treasure house.

As you drive from Edinburgh, you know you're in Knight Templar country. On the right-hand side of the road (just before Ikea and following signs for the village of Temple – see ***FT146:47***), is an artificial ski slope and, next to it, a small area of woodland. If you look closely, you'll see that the woodland is in the shape of a cross; a Templar cross, as some will tell you. A quick investigation reveals it to be no more than 200–300 years old and, as the Templars were officially disbanded in 1307, a bit on the young side. Oh well.

Continuing, you come to a turning for Roslin (with the Chapel marked), which takes you past the Roslin Institute, home of Dolly. At the time of my visit she was living in splendid isolation, courtesy of foot-and-mouth disease. A couple of minutes later, and you're at the Chapel's small carpark. And that's it. You're there: this is the spot which has inspired a cottage publishing industry and would like to be the British Rennes-le-Château.



MARY EVANS PICTURE LIBRARY - ENGRAVING BY J CLEGHORN AFTER T ALLOM, 1835.

Rosslyn Chapel is small. It's only 90ft (27.4m) long, 40ft (12m) wide and 30ft (9m) high, but size isn't everything. The Chapel has one of the greatest collections of carved decoration in the United Kingdom and puts many larger buildings to shame. William Sinclair (St Clair) founded it in 1446, and nothing is there by accident; all the carvings were made for his approval in wood before the stone masons created the finished product.

So, how do the Knights Templar fit into this? They were warrior monks who are alleged to have excavated the treasures of the Temple of Solomon and amassed untold wealth. Disbanded in 1307, their treasure (including a mysterious head of Baphomet which they were supposed to worship) largely disappeared. Some reports say it was spirited away from the port of La Rochelle and eventually found its way to Scotland. (At the time, Scotland was excommunicated and was thus a safe haven for the Templars, who had been betrayed by the Pope). The treasure was given into the hands of one William Sinclair, who became the grand master of the Masons, the organisation born from the ashes of the Templars. Sinclair kept the treasure at his castle at Roslin; when it burnt down, he rescued the chests of treasure before he saved his wife and family. The treasure then passed into the keeping of his descendants, the hereditary grand masters of the masons. Eventually, a later William Sinclair built his Chapel and, supposedly, buried the treasure in the vaults. William died before the Chapel was completed and his son (another William – an imaginative bunch, these Sinclairs) completed what had been started in 1486. Some controversy exists here, as the Chapel is obviously unfinished. Is it, as some say, a deliberate recreation of a ruin (Solomon's Temple), or did William simply not want to spend more money after his father's death, merely completing enough of the building to make it serviceable?

The original plans and models of the Chapel have been lost, and only copies of selected documents remain.This allows for any amount of theorising, and there's plenty of raw material for theories. The number of carvings is massive; there are over 100 green men alone inside the Chapel. Some books claim that the Chapel lacks any conventional Christian imagery; their authors, though, don't seem to have looked very closely. There are representations of the crucifixion, of Moses, the apostles and many biblical tales. Like many old churches, it also contains iconography from older religions, the many green men being a perfect example.

Sinclair rescued the chests of treasure before he saved his wife and family

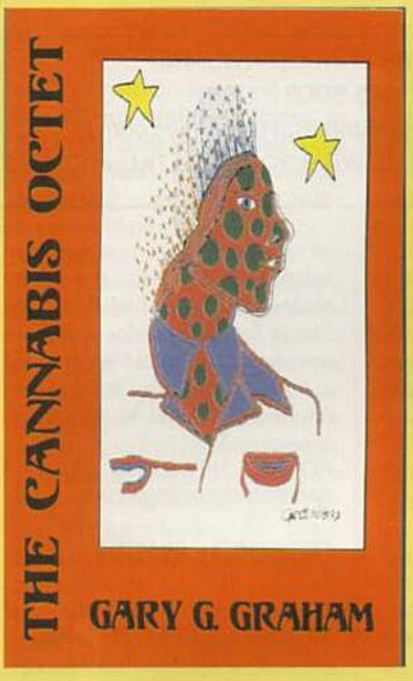
But some carvings take on great significance for certain groups. One in particular shows two men, one kneeling with a noose around his neck, a Bible in his hand and a blindfold over his eyes – part of the modern Masonic initiation ritual. It's imagery like this that people use to justify the connection between the Knights Templar and the Masons.

But what of the treasure? Well, if all of the treasure reputed to be here was present, the area under the chapel would be something like the final scene of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. The Ark of the Covenant, the body or head of Jesus Christ (Baphomet?), the treasure of Solomon's Temple and much more, are all said to be in the vaults. These have not been opened for 250 years, and we know that they contain the bodies of the Sinclairs up to that point.

Scottish Heritage and the Rosslyn Chapel Trust have not approved proposals to allow excavations, so the mystery remains. In this short article, I've only scratched the surface of the beauty and mystery of this place… and I haven't even mentioned the Apprentice Pillar!

Irrespective of the real or imagined mystery, it's a beautiful building in a beautiful location and well worth a visit.

GORDON RUTTER is a freelance writer and lecturer based in Edinburgh. He is a regular contributor to *FT* and the organiser of the Edinburgh Fortean Society.



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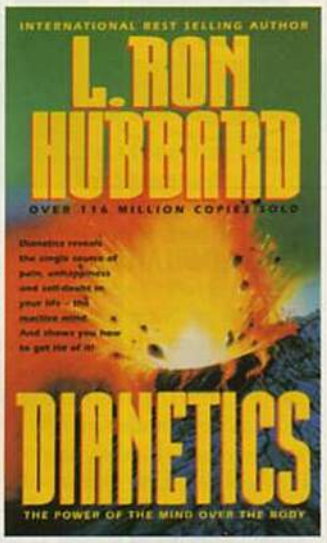
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Immortals among us

What if the events depicted in fictional texts were actually taking place? Beccaelizabeth wonders whether the world of the Highlander movies and TV series has somehow overlapped with our own. How would we know this was happening? Perhaps our newsclipping files already hold the answer.

THE MOVIE *HIGHLANDER*, AND the TV series that followed, depicts a world in which competing immortals fight through history (and, indeed, into the present), with the victors gaining the 'energy' of the vanquished. This secret world of duelling immortals frequently spills over into the everyday, mortal one. I began to wonder if it had left any traces.

Immortals, it seems, begin life unremarkably enough, apart from the fact that they are foundlings. They age normally and live unremarkable lives… until their first death, which is usually untimely and violent. They do not stay dead for long, though, and soon rise uninjured; thereafter they heal almost instantly. They may live forever, assuming they can avoid being decapitated; if by another Immortal, he will take their power in a lightning-like transfer dubbed a 'Quickening'.

If this perpetual contest were taking place in the background of our world, what would we know of it? What unrecognised pieces of this story would turn up in the papers? What reports (extraordinary enough in their own right) would, when viewed together, reveal *Highlander*'s fantasy to be based in reality? The key elements of an Immortal's life are, in fact, staples of *FT* news: unidentified babies turning up; 'miraculous' escapes from serious injury or illness; people waking up at their own funeral; 'nutters' running around with swords; decapitated bodies and strange lightning.

DAVE NEEDHAM

An Immortal arrives in the world in a mysterious manner, found as an abandoned new-born baby with no clue to the identity of its parents. Sadly, there are a great many cases like this every year, like the new-born found on a church pew in St Augustine Catholic Church in California a couple of years ago.[1] A church is, at least, a safe place for a baby Immortal; in their lore, no Immortal will harm another on holy ground.

There's nothing to distinguish an Immortal child from a mortal one, so no one would suspect it was 'different'. An Immortal's special power is only activated in a situation that would be fatal to a mortal. The next noteworthy point in an Immortal's life, therefore, would be a notice of a very lucky escape, or a 'miraculous' return from the dead. Among many reports in this category we might mention a woman walking on the tracks at Sjomarken, Sweden, who was hit by an express train at 60mph (97 km/h). Stopping to investigate, the train staff found the woman staggering about on the embankment some 200 metres (656ft) away. Angrily, she straightened her clothes and walked away, claiming she had no recollection of the incident.[2]

Not only would an Immortal survive such accidents with few injuries, their recoveries from otherwise fatal illnesses would, likewise, be deemed 'miraculous'. There are also reports of accidents triggering unexplained cures. Consider young Aoife Tiernan, of Co Meath. In 1997, Aoife was on her way to hospital, where she was receiving treatment for leukæmia, when she suffered severe injuries in a car crash. A court in Dublin was told, in June 2000, that the young girl's leukæmia had vanished after the accident.[3]

A lucky Immortal might live to a great age after his or her supposed 'fatal' accident, as did Kenneth Andrews. Accidentally poisoned with the wrong medicine during an appendectomy in 1930, in Hong Kong, he was told he only had a short time to live. Nevertheless, he went on to be shot twice in World War II, stabbed, bitten by a rabid dog and to contract malaria. He finally died in March 2000, in Bournemouth, aged 106…[4] or so we are told. One wonders if his heir bore an uncanny resemblance to his benefactor as a young man…

There are a great many accounts of people declared legally dead reviving, or of the nearly buried 'waking up' in the nick of time – like Asunción Gutierrez, 100, who startled her mourning family when she sat up in her coffin and asked for some food. According to her grandson, it was the third time this had happened![5]

For our young Immortal, the apparently distinctive signs of death bring great risk of premature burial. Probably the most dramatic case is that of Angelo Hays, 19, from the French village of St Quentin de Chalais, in 1937. As reported by Jan Bondeson in *FT*, Angelo was thrown headfirst into a brick wall when his motorcycle skidded. He was declared dead and his body was taken to the local morgue where, because of the terrible injury, even his parents were not allowed to view the corpse. Three days later, Angelo was buried. Two days after the funeral, an insurance inspector had the body exhumed and removed to Bordeaux to ascertain the exact cause of death. The doctor in charge was surprised to find Angelo's

letters

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LIFE AS SIMULATION

The ideas of Nick Bostrom and Robin Hanson that all of our lives may be computer simulations [***FT165:18***] echo those in the SF novel *Simulacron-3* by US writer Daniel F Galouye (1920–1976). First published in 1964, the book is mostly available second-hand in the UK under the title *Counterfeit World*, in the 1970 Sphere paperback edition.

In the novel, market researchers replace public opinion polls on new products by designing a computer-simulated society in which they can test consumer reaction directly – and then realise that they themselves, and their own world, are computer simulations. (In fact, Galouye wasn't the first with this idea; Frederik Pohl's 1954 short story "The Tunnel Under The World" deals with much the same concept.)

As your report says, there is no need to fill in every detail of the world; but this is how the characters discover that their own world isn't real, when they spot inconsistencies, and when, in a terrifying moment, they drive somewhere unexpected and find that the road suddenly vanishes – "the very earth itself dropped off into an impenetrable barrier of stygian blackness". It hadn't been programmed.

There was a German TV version of *Counterfeit World* in 1973, *Welt am Draht* (World on a Wire), directed by Rainer Werner Fassbinder, and a 1999 film, *The Thirteenth Floor*, directed by Joseph Rusnak.

Sadly almost unknown today, Galouye also produced the superb novel *Dark Universe* (1961), in which a civilisation of humans living underground, completely in the dark, "see" by the echoes from clickstones; when they first encounter torchlight, they describe it in one of the most memorable phrases in science fiction as "a cone of silent sound". Galouye's other novels and short stories are good but unexceptional, but these two are neglected SF classics.

DAVID V BARRETT
London

CRASHING BIRDS

A few days before the World Trade Center disaster, two birds (presumably pigeons) flew into our lounge windows from our garden and left their highly detailed greasy impressions on the glass. On discovering the impressions, we checked the ground below for dead birds – the impacts must have been quite hard, both birds at full flight perhaps from cats – but there wasn't even a feather!

PETER GREGO
Editor, Popular Astronomy magazine, Birmingham

[Editor's note: I append two other bird imprint photographs. Pete Glastonbury sent in the one with the building in the background, but the details of the other one have been lost. For other examples, see **FT63:6** and **FT86:17**.]

YELLOW TEETH

I am a practising cosmetic dentist in the north of Scotland, with a background in forensic dentistry. Regarding the query in Mythchaser about whether yellow teeth are stronger than white teeth, here is the – or an – answer. Teeth get darker and yellowed as the years go by, so if an elderly person still has teeth they are going to be darker – from stains, wear and tear and inner calcification of the nerve canal. Old teeth are yellow, so yellow teeth last a long time.

Fluoride in the water system can protect teeth from decay, but in excess amounts can yellow teeth. Though unsightly, these teeth are resistant to decay and will last a long time – hence yellow teeth are stronger. Developmental defects in teeth (caused by childhood illness or malnutrition) leave white areas on the teeth – this is due to inadequate mineralisation of the tooth structure and can lead to early tooth decay if in the presence of bacteria and refined carbohydrates. Whiter areas also appear on teeth where early decay can be seen, a sign of problems for the future. Whitening of teeth has no effect on their strength or resistance to decay – the chemical processes are totally different. Whitened teeth under a supervised programme are less likely to give bother. Go on, smile!

DR ANDREW J CROTHERS
By email

ANYONE SEEN FAIRIES?

I am in the process of writing a new book about Dorset fairylore. So far I have: Music Barrows, The Nanny Diamonds of Portland, Pillywiggins, lots of Nymphs and Nymphets, the Colepexy, the Spoorn, a Jack O' Lantern and Will O' Wisp, the fairies of Castle Hill at East Chelborough, and the tragic tale of Ann Ward of Symondsbury. I would be very interested to hear from any readers who have had their own Dorset fairy experience – perhaps seen fairies as a child or glimpsed a midnight fairy revel. Any information would be very much appreciated.

ROBERT NEWLAND
darkdorset@hotmail.com

CROP CIRCLE ORIGINS

Georgina Bruni ("Signs and Wonders", ***FT164:51***) makes a porous case for the alleged mysteriousness of crop circles. In fact the first British report of a crop circle was at Guildford, Surrey, 21 July 1880 (see *Nature*, January 2000). When I last checked, 1974 was part of the 20th century, not the 21st century. Bruni omits to mention earlier British crop circle cases, such as the double rings at Evenlode, Gloucestershire (June 1960), or any of the numerous overseas cases predating 1974, e.g. the Canadian and Australian cases of the 1960s and 1970s or the Orebro, Sweden, case of 1972. Many of these earlier cases involved both circles and rings, so it is incorrect to state that the earlier cases only involved simple circles. Note that I refer here solely to contemporary accounts of crop circles and rings reported and investigated *at the time*, not to memories of events allegedly occurring decades ago (some sceptics have wrongly suggested that all the historic evidence is retrospective and therefore untrustworthy). For numerous crop circle cases predating 1974, read Terry Wilson's *The Secret History of Crop Circles, The True, Untold Story of the World's Greatest Mystery* (1998), ISBN 0-906290-7-10. [*Editor's note: see also the chronology in* **FT63:35**.]

Bruni compounds these errors by stating that "nobody knew who or what was responsible" for the initial simple circles of the 1980s. In fact some of the early 1980 cases were also man-made, such as the newspaper hoax at Westbury (August 1983) or the second ringed circle at Cheesefoot Head, Hampshire (July 1986). This latter case was almost certainly made by farmhands from Cornwall, but was still promoted as "genuine" by the crop circle "experts". I published a map of 20 known hoaxers or groups of hoax-

ers known to be operating across central and southern England in 1992. The hoaxers included bored youths, travellers, agricultural students and even farmers! Some were responding to large financial inducements from magazines like *Take A Break*. Many just enjoyed the thrill of hoaxing the credulous.

It is deeply contentious to state that "most" researchers were "not convinced" of Bower and Chorley's claims to have made numerous crop circles (*Today* newspaper, September 1991). Many of the original researchers of the 1980s – Dr Terence Meaden, Ian Mrzyglod, Jenny Randles and myself to name but four – are all convinced that these two men really did make the circles they claim to have made. We have published our reasons for accepting their claim elsewhere, but Bruni makes no reference to this impressive body of evidence. Many of the pro-ETH crop circle researchers of this period have also disappeared from the public eye for reasons that remain suspiciously obscure. At least we admitted that we had been deceived!

Contrary to Bruni, at no time have Bower and Chorley ever claimed to have made "all" of the original circles of the 1970s. They restricted their circles to Hampshire, Sussex and South Wiltshire. They were copied by the group seen making crop circles at Beckhampton, Wiltshire (2 Aug 1991) (possibly the United Bureau of Investigation) – and they were subsequently copied by many other groups and individuals (e.g. the group cautioned by the police at Amersham, Buckinghamshire, in June 1992 who had already been seen making circles at night in the vicinity of Chequers). [Editor's note: For Jim Schnabel's 1993 gazetteer of circlemakers, see ***FT68:37-42***.] The various circle-making techniques available are easily copied and the expertise and knowledge required has now spread out around the globe as people delight in ridiculing the subject and its researchers.

Finally, the claim that genuine crop circles are pristine and show no signs of damage has long been a cornerstone of that well-known branch of ufology that seeks to perpetuate myths rather than provide falsifiable explanations. Matthew Lawrence visited many of the Hampshire formations of the early 1990s as soon as they were reported. He later explained that he saw obvious signs of damage that (strangely) are not discussed in the best-selling crop circle books of the period. Despite this, Bruni demands that circlemakers create massive formations without any sign of damage – which of course is exactly what they did at the West Wycombe circlemaking competition of 1992 [***FT64:7***] (where none of the circlemaking techniques cost remotely like $5,000). With such a history of success against believers, it is little surprise that some circlemakers have failed to rise to Bruni's latest challenge.

PAUL FULLER
Lordswood, Southampton

FROGS AND COWS

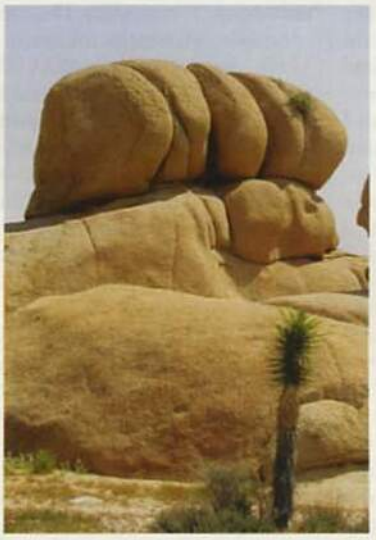
In those innocent *Cider With Rosie* days – before they learnt about mugging, smack and burning out stolen XR3s – a certain type of youth used to while away the summer afternoons by inserting straws into the rectums of frogs, blowing hard and inflating them. They would apparently balloon up, still alive, to a ridiculous size before exploding – or so these kids used to claim. I have spoken to many people who have met others who knew someone who did this, but never anybody who was actually present. Has anyone actually witnessed this mythological spectacle and – to any biologists who may be reading – is it physically possible?

From frogs to cows, or portions of them at any rate. Countless folk have told of restaurants where steaks are served which are *so* big that, if anyone can manage to finish them, they don't have to pay. I always used to wonder how many extra staff would be needed just to watch customers throughout the entire meal to ensure that nothing was hidden in handbags or wherever.

On checking two of these places, I found that there had never been any free offer, but one gave away a car sticker and the other a certificate proclaiming "I ate the Gutbuster". Despite my assurance that these eateries exist only in modern folktales, many people are absolutely adamant that they are out there. Is there any restaurant in Britain where this mythological offer actually exists?

IAN JARVIS
Fairburn, West Yorkshire

SIMULACRA CORNER



This stone fist was photographed in 2001 by Ben Slotover and Paul Elliott in Joshua Tree National Park, California.

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them to the editorial post box (with a stamped addressed envelope or international reply coupon) and we'll pay a fiver or ten dollars for any we use.

PHONE MYSTERIES

At the beginning of September 2002, I replaced my failing mobile phone with a new model. Five or six months earlier, I had agreed to help a friend's mother-in-law, Mary, with an event she was organising, but hadn't spoken to her since then. Around the second week in September, my friend rang and asked me to come to a planning meeting for the event the following week. At the end of the meeting, Mary said that she'd been planning to call me for a couple of weeks to respond to my messages, but hadn't got around to it. Puzzled, I asked her what messages she meant. She explained that she'd had two or three voicemail messages on her mobile from a male who sounded very like me. The messages were along the lines of: "I can't get hold of you – please get back in touch". She had rung back, and left a voicemail message, apologising for her confusion and asking the mystery caller to call back and leave some more details.

I explained that it wasn't me, as I didn't have her telephone number. She then got her mobile out, called up a list of received calls, and jotted down the mystery caller's number. It was my new mobile number, which only around four or five people had at that point. I asked for her number and remembered it as one I had deleted from my call log a few days earlier; not having recognised it at the time, I had assumed it had been a friend calling me. However, I'd never received the voicemail message she claimed to have left. Assuming there was a technical error somewhere, I called my mobile service provider, and they checked my records. Sure enough, there was a call to Mary's number three days earlier, at 1.09pm, lasting about 20 seconds. There were calls at 1.08 and 1.10 as well, which I remembered making, as I'd contacted a couple of people during my lunch break from work.

My service provider assured me that there was absolutely no way that my line could become crossed with another or 'cloned'; besides, the chances that this would happen with someone who happened to be contacting Mary three days before I was to see her seem very small (though not impossible, I suppose).

So, any suggestions? Did I black out whilst walking through the centre of Newcastle, and at other times, and make phone calls I have no recollection of to a telephone number I didn't know? Does my phone have a mind of its own, or the ability to channel spirits without their own direct line? Or is there a phantom 'me' somewhere, whose life is accidentally intersecting with mine?

PHIL MOORE
Bedlington, Northumberland

MARK SPAIN

(PHONE MYSTERIES CONTINUED)

A few years ago, my friend Liz was staying overnight with her sister and brother-in-law in Bracknell, Berkshire. She had left their number by the telephone, and we had agreed that I would ring during the evening to see how she was getting on. However, when I dialled the number she had left, I got a 'number unobtainable' signal. I tried several times with the same result. I deduced that Liz had made a mistake in writing down the number. Fortunately, I had her brother-in-law's business card and I knew he worked from home. When I unearthed the card, though, I found that it had exactly the same number as Liz had left me. I tried a couple more times, dialling each digit very deliberately, but the number was still unobtainable.

Being now convinced that I had the right number, I rang the operator to explain my problem and ask if there was a fault. The operator said that there was no fault but that the number simply did not exist, and indeed that there were no numbers at all in Bracknell beginning with that particular digit. (I was calling long distance and including the national code.) Assuming that the Bracknell numbers had been changed, I turned to Directory Inquiries, giving the full name of Liz's brother-in-law and the address where they had lived for over 25 years. Directory Inquiries said that they had no record of anyone of that name and address. I concluded that Liz's brother-in-law must be ex-directory. There was nothing more I could do, and so at that point I gave up.

The next night, Liz returned. I apologised for not calling her and explained what had happened. She dialled the number, and got through straight away. She then asked her brother-in-law about being ex-directory. He said that far from being ex-directory, he is very much in the directory since he has a home business, and he even has an entry in Yellow Pages.

It seems that the gremlins were trying very hard to stop me getting through to Liz that night. Why, I do not know.

MARC WIDDOWSON
Bedford

CUTTING WORMS

Regarding 'Double your worms' *FT164:26*: If you chop an earthworm in half, you'll probably end up with a dead worm. Cut a flatworm (planarian) in half, and both halves will regenerate into complete individuals. A classic experiment in the 19th century showed that a flatworm could be split into eight and produce eight new individuals. See http://planaria.neuro.utah.edu/sanchezsit/Randolph.htm

Since the 1950s, this has been the source of a mystery in psychology: non-local memory. Train a flatworm and cut it in half, and it is no great surprise that the front end retains its training. What is surprising is that the individual that grows from the rear end also retains the same amount of training... *[See: JV McConnell, AL Jacobson, & DP Kimble (1959): 'The effects of regeneration upon retention of a conditioned response in the planarian', Journal of Comparative and Physiological Psychology, 52, 1–5. For a recent study, see:* **http://199.93.248.253/~mlevin/newlab.dir/worm_figures.dir/cmueller.pdf** *]*

DAVID HAMBLING
By email

MANCHESTER GHOSTS

We are researching accounts of Manchester's ghosts and hauntings, with a view to publication, and wonder if your readers could assist us. We are taking Manchester to mean Greater Manchester within the M60. We would also be interested in any personal first-hand stories from Alderley Edge, and the larger stately homes – Alderley Park, Dunham Massey, Tatton Park, Bramhall Hall, Lyme Park, Quarry Bank Mill, Gawsworth Hall, Tabley House, Peover Hall, Little Moreton Hall, Hare Hill, Capesthorne Hall, Wythenshawe Hall and Heaton Hall. Of particular interest are Hannah Beswick and the Ferranti Factory, Boggart Hole Clough, Nell Beck at Alderley Edge, and the Wardley Howling Skull – primary sources or first-hand accounts only please. We would welcome guidance to printed sources and archives that might prove useful.

We would also welcome any guidance on spiritualism in Manchester. In particular, we would like to discover what happened to the Britten Memorial Institute and Library, as well as the *Two Worlds* magazine, with which Emma Hardinge Britten was involved in Manchester in the 1870s. Does anyone know where these archives are situated?

STEWART MACNALLY
AMCD (Publishers) Ltd, PO Box 182, Altrincham, Cheshire WA15 9UA, web@amcd.co.uk

PYRAMID BUILDING

According to several best-sellers, the precision of fitting together the stones of the Great Pyramid could not be achieved by modern engineers; and it couldn't have been a tomb since by manual labour it would have taken centuries to build, and there weren't enough labourers in ancient Egypt anyway.

On 28 October, BBC1 threw down the gauntlet with the dramatised documentary, *Pyramid*. Frankly, it was very convincing and well produced. It seems to have been demonstrated that we know precisely in what year this structure was begun, when various stages were completed, and when it was finished. We even know the nicknames of the teams of builders. No "levitation" by psychokinesis or sound vibration was involved – it was perfectly achievable by manual labour. Especially since – the kind of detail the New Agers avoid relating – the vast interior of the pyramid was not carefully constructed at all, but filled with rubble. So according to the BBC, who admittedly made no reference to less conventional theories, we should all know, as we supposedly did decades ago, that the Great Pyramid is a conventional construction with little mystery attached. Any comments?

DAVID TAME
By email

EVIL TOY?

While visiting relatives in South Carolina at the age of about 10 or 11, my cousin and I were playing in a shallow stream behind an aunt's house when I saw a red toy speedboat floating towards me. I was amazed and excited because it was the exact toy speedboat that I had wanted. When it came within a few feet I ran towards it, but a strange feeling came over me and the toy boat turned and disappeared into a hole in the bank. I inspected the hole and found it thick with roots and debris.

The current of the stream would not have been able to force it past the roots. So where did it go? I thought of reaching

IT HAPPENED TO ME...

SHE'S BEEN SLIMED!

One night in August 1994, a fellow police officer and I were patrolling the Queens Park area of Brighton in Sussex. Around 2am, we were asked to attend an incident outside the park gates. We found paramedics attempting to resuscitate an elderly woman who was lying by the roadside.

We were told that when found, the woman was covered in green slime, which appeared to have drowned her. There was plenty of this viscous ooze in evidence, both all over the woman and the attending medics. There was also a large amount in the gutter running some 20ft (6m) down the road. The old lady was taken to the nearby A&E where further attempts were made to revive her which, sadly, were unsuccessful. When the lab examined the substance it was found to be "algæ-like" and apparently had been ingested in sufficient quantities to cause the woman's stomach to explode.

One theory bandied about was that the victim was a "hydromaniac" who had been drinking from the pond in the park and had staggered away only for the algæ to "ferment" inside her, expand, and cause the injury. However, her family denied any history of this type of activity, and were obviously distressed at this suggestion. We noticed the water level in the lake was low, and she would have been obliged to climb into the muddy shallows and drink the stagnant water from the edge. There was no mud on her feet or hands, and no muddy footprints; and the slime didn't smell stagnant, but had a soapy smell not unlike detergent.

MARK NOVELL
By email

into the hole, but my cousin told me not to, as there could be a muskrat or poison snake in there. A few Wicca friends have since told me that I encountered an evil spirit that was trying to cause me harm. It's certainly odd that the exact toy I wanted appeared in a stream so far from home.

JIM PARRIS
By email

KIDNAPPING FOR HIRE

I was interested in your report on Brock Enright's kidnapping for hire business [*FT164:8*]. When Enright was interviewed on the Rob Nelson Show on Fox Network, Rob asked me to be present for my opinion as a psychiatrist. From the medical perspective, the infliction of trauma and abuse is not healing, and could easily worsen, the condition of a client with any pre-existing emotional disturbance. Immobilisation, confinement and stress could also bring on a fatal heart attack or other physical catastrophes in persons with medical risk factors.

Enright stressed that he makes all his clients sign a release absolving him of any responsibilities, but this would be cold comfort in the case of someone being seriously hurt. When pressed on the issue of his responsibility, he merely replied that, like many others, his job was "a risky business".

Your report did not mention that, in addition to binding, gagging and confinement, Enright's boutique kidnapping experience also includes aggressive, close-up confrontation by a group of torturers dressed in black clothes and masks, shouting threats and insults at the poor disoriented client. When I spoke to other members of the group, most were quick to emphasise that they only dealt with video production details and had nothing to do with the kidnapping and torture part. Those who admitted to participating stressed the parallels between their work and performance art.

In the light of the recent US sniper killer and other serial murderers in the news, I would be worried about catching the attention of real psychopaths by participating in these acts of physical and mental abuse. Nevertheless, when I notice the impressive press coverage Enright has gleaned through his kidnapping company, I begin to smell a little snake oil. Perhaps he is nothing more than another entrepreneur seeing the chance to make a buck on the public's fear and fascination with depravity.

WES BURGESS, MD, PHD
Los Angeles, California

AUTOMATIC DICTATION

Coming as I do from a family that loathes getting up in the morning, I especially appreciated Gary Lachman's "Waking Sleep" [*FT163:42-46*]. For the last several years, I've experienced the odd, but not unprecedented, phenomenon of sluggishly waking up in the night or morning and finding my mind – or a mind – already active. Strangely, my 'ego-consciousness,' upon coming awake, observes what appears to be another consciousness already hard at work. Typically, I lie back passively and 'listen' to a book being read aloud or dictated, not audibly, but in my head.

On the first occasion, it seemed to be an introduction to a work about folklore and archetypes, about Santa Claus specifically. The writing and the depth of understanding were quite brilliant. On another occasion I woke up in the night to 'hear' a voice saying/dictating, "Like Old Testament monster Leviathan, cast out of the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve after the Fall, there was only one Nico." I took the hint and used it as the opening line for an essay I wrote on Nico's 1975 album *The End*, and then posted it as a review on Amazon, where it can still be read.

This summer last, I spontaneously thought aloud, "Who is that speaking?" when I woke at night to hear the usual dictation going on. Much to my surprise, a loud, angry voice immediately responded with the equivalent of "Shut up, you! You're nothing but stupid elephants we ride!" Then there was 'silence,' as I sat up fully awake thinking about it. When my mind or normal consciousness becomes dominant, the 'voice(s)' disappear immediately, as the world of sleep normally does.

Since folklore and Jungian psychology are interests of mine, and since I wrote a book about Leviathan 10 years ago and also know a good bit about the voodoo religion and its gods 'riding' practitioners, can I conclude that these experiences are somehow just psychic background noise, like tapes of information going round and round? If that's the case, then how is it such noise takes on a life of its own, and creativity as well? How can it respond to questions?

I know that artists from Blake, Rilke, Yeats and Robert Frost experienced hearing voices, often related to present or future creative activity, whether from within or without. Recently, Keith Richard claimed that 'Satisfaction' was composed when he spontaneously awoke in the night and heard the music and lyrics clearly, all of a piece, ringing inside his head. He wrote both down, fell asleep, and discovered them by his bed the next evening, as he had completely forgotten about the experience upon rising. Tori Amos also claims that many if not most of her songs reach her through a similar means.

Can anyone shed any hard light on this, or share similar experiences?

JOSEPH E BARNES
Brooklyn, New York

Gary Lachman's article brought to mind some odd hypnagogic sentences that I experienced some five years ago. The phenomenon ran for three or four consecutive nights and of the resulting messages delivered to me from the Great Beyond, I've only retained two. The first was: "The bigger the man, the smaller the mountain" (which sounds so hackneyed, I feel I must have subconsciously absorbed it from something I had either watched on television or read somewhere), while the second, more profound, was: "A punchline is still a punchline, whether misunderstood or diagnosed."

Shortly after receiving these "otherworldly" missives, I experienced my first, and so far only, "hagging" episode (and I can date it too – 2 February 1997). The date is important as it provides a timeline to my own personal medical history – I had just undergone major, reconstructive, intestinal surgery and had been prescribed a number of different pain-killers and other narcotic sedatives to alleviate my discomfort; a medley of powerful pills which, by the way, were later discovered to be 'conflicting').

Put into the kind of context that Van Dusen suggests, the messages, seen in hindsight, have a kind of comforting quality to them – answers to questions that I had never personally asked but were, nevertheless, attempting to soothe, and see me through, my time of need and self-doubt. Something to sleep on, for sure.

TREVOR OUELLETTE
North Bay, Ontario

HORNED WOMAN

This photo and account of a horned woman appeared in the *Wide World Magazine* vol.25 no.148 p414 (issue of July 1910).

The magazine reports:

"The photo [..] is from India. It depicts a Sontal woman, and the reader who sends the picture writes as follows concerning it: 'The photo was taken by me at Jamtara. The woman was born in Deogarh Sub-Division and is now about 35 years of age. Six years ago, she says, she got a speck on her forehead. This gradually hardened and by degrees a species of horn grew out of her head. This horn is now two inches in diameter at the base and one inch at the top. It is exactly like a deer horn. The horn is growing so fast that a portion of it had to be cut off by the civil surgeon. The woman does not suffer any pain and has grown-up children none of whom are afflicted in the same way.'"

BOB SKINNER
By email

[For other horned people, see *FT43:36-40.*]

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ED. RUSS KICK

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The Revolution *will* be televised. And there will be TV tie-in underground literature, at $25 a pop. This literature will package itself as 'forbidden knowledge', tapping into the cynicism of The Revolution's core target market: fashionable 20-something American consumers with large disposable incomes and a general antipathy to current affairs (born of the simplistic attitude that politics is a racket, and the not-so-simplistic belief that newspapers and TV are Establishment propaganda).

The Revolution's samizdat will look something like *Everything You Know is Wrong* (hereafter *EYKIW*): glossy, well-produced (on non-recycled paper), with a distinctive logo emblazoned on the cover, and an introduction that urges you to steal the book rather than buy it (countered by a disclaimer warning that the publishers do not endorse any of the views expressed within and accept no responsibility for blah blah).

Its blurb will be littered with teasers like these: • 'China has super-missiles that can destroy the entire US Navy' – am I meant to be worried by this? Last time I looked, leaving aside the question of what exactly a 'super-missile' is, America had enough nuclear missiles to kill the global population several times over; • 'Some of the biggest banks in the world turn a blind eye to money laundering' – get away, you scamp! • 'Many disabled people don't want to be "cured" and don't admire Christopher Reeve' – to which the only possible response is 'no shit!'

You get the idea. Gather up a clutch of perfectly good essays (on everything from fringe culture to conspiracies) and wrap the resulting symposium in bad-boy radical anarchotechnogrunge-punkskategeek chic and – hey presto – you've 'spun' your product as a classic underground manual like *The Anarchist's Cookbook* or *Gunrunning for Pleasure and Profit*. In fact, it's a sheep in wolf's clothing, containing 'forbidden knowledge' which is mostly postmodernist contrarianism and the mechanically-recovered meat of the orthodox news media: 'top-secret information' that is only available to anyone willing to read the inside pages of a broadsheet newspaper. Call me a hopelessly pretentious git if you like, but the paradox presented by this mass-production of ostensibly counter-cultural artefacts seems to be worth a study in itself (perhaps called *Manufacturing Dissent*... yes, that has a certain ring to it).

For all my sneers, this is a pretty good collection, miles ahead of similar attempts like Feral House's influential but ropey *Secret and Suppressed* (1993). Some of the essays are absolutely first-class. There's journo god Greg Palast leaking secret documents from the World Bank and giving the gasbags of globalisation a well-deserved booting. There's editor Russ Kick with an overwhelmingly well-researched essay on the US government's foreknowledge of the World Trade Center attacks. There's a stunning piece by John Gatto on the impact of social engineering theories on the US education system (which, in my view, should be turned into a book in itself, or at least an Adam Curtis documentary), a truly horrible piece on Indian 'untouchables', and a hilariously-scary round-up of accidents and errors at nuclear power plants.

There's dross, too. Arianna Huffington's screed against drug companies, for example, fizzles out after a page and a half, having added precisely nothing to the debate. Most stupid of all is an attack on the European Union by

SOME ENTRIES ARE SO OPAQUE THAT I'M NOT SURE WHAT THEY'RE ABOUT

Lindsay Jenkins (author of the exciting-sounding *Britain Held Hostage: The Coming Euro-Dictatorship*). There are, of course, coherent anti-EU arguments, but this isn't one of them: it's a reheated stew of irrelevant anecdotes, factoids and scare-stories, including the extravagant assertion that the EU's encouragement of minority cultures is actually a diabolical scheme to create isolated communities of 'second-class citizens [who are] easier to control.' This sort of stuff goes down well with right-wing American readers (and furthers the USA's official opposition to the creation of a rival unified trading bloc), but is silly and not a little dangerous.

In between the two extremes, there is a raft of undefinable and provocative essays which is where the true pleasure of the book is to be found. Wendy McElroy on prostitution, Annie Gaylor on *Why Women Need Freedom from Religion* (which, incidentally, contains the most wilful misrepresentation of the story of Lot's daughters that I've ever read), and Thomas Szasz on psychiatry's perpetuation of convenient theories about mental illness, are just some of the most rewarding reads. Some entries are rather more mysterious, even after repeated rereading: *A Canticle for Osama bin Laden* is so very opaque that I'm really not sure what it's about; *Charlie Manson's Image* is so elliptical that I'm not even sure if it's actually about anything at all. You could happily browse among these pieces for a great length of time.

Indeed, you may have to. Because *EYKIW*, like its predecessor *You Are Being Lied To*, has *no index*. This is supposedly due to 'constraints of time and page count', an excuse which fails to convince when you see that *EYKIW* has six blank endpapers (*six!*) and that the index is available – on Disinfo's website. I'm sure that I must have heard of more blatantly cynical online marketing strategies, but I'm not quite sure where. Create a mirror site, or print out copies of the index and surrepititiously tuck them into copies of *EYKIW* at your local bookshop. I'm sure Disinfo wouldn't disapprove, since – hey! – it's all part of information terrorism and (as they put it) 'fuck[ing with] consensus reality'.

Either way, I suspect that if you follow the suggestion in the introduction and attempt to steal *EYKIW* from a bookshop, Disinfo won't contribute towards your legal costs.

Put in a request for *EYKIW* at your local library, instead: it's legal, free, environmentally-friendly, and won't profit the publishers a penny. Moderates of the world, unite: you have absolutely nothing to lose, since – as the majority of *EYKIW*'s essays show – you don't even own your own chains any more.

GARRICK ALDER

FORTEAN TIMES VERDICT
GENERALLY STIMULATING READING (BUT 10 OUT OF 10 FOR NERVE) **7**

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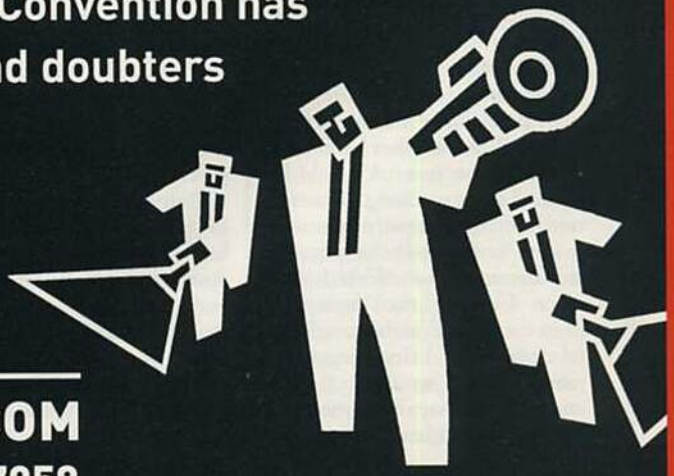

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DREAMING

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J ALLAN HOBSON

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THE OXFORD BOOK OF DREAMS

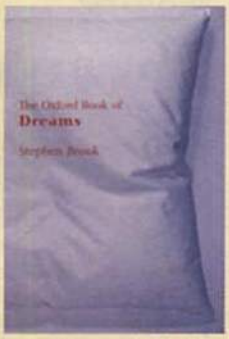
ED. STEPHEN BROOK

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2002
PB, 269PP, IND, £9.99/$16.95
ISBN 0 19 280385 9

The first sentence of J Allan Hobson's *Dreaming* is: "Dreaming has fascinated humankind since the beginning of recorded history". The first sentence of Stephen Brook's *Oxford Book of Dreams* is: "Because dreaming is a ubiquitous activity, dreams have always been ascribed the greatest significance". While both these openings are undeniably true, they also unwittingly illustrate another truth: our dreams may be endlessly fascinating, but books about other people's dreams can be rather less so.

Dreaming is an introduction to the physiology of sleep, approaching dreams by penetrating the mysteries of the physical processes which underlie them. *The Oxford Book of Dreams* is a literary anthology of recorded dreams. They are very different endeavours, both quite accomplished and elegant in the tasks they set themselves, but neither of them are entirely satisfying.

Hobson's *Dreaming* is a brisk summary of dream science as revealed through sleep experiments, which covers a vast terrain with great energy, pausing only to give Freud a good kicking at every opportunity. His central point is that the content of dreams is much less important than their form, and it's the latter which clues us in to what is really happening in the brain while we sleep. He uses his own dreams, recorded over many years, to illustrate this point, and in this context they're quite interesting. He's not telling you the story of his dreams so much as pointing out the holes in it, the weird details which we tidy up and edit out when we recount them – the pointless lapses in logic, the way a dream location can feel like our home although it looks quite different, or an object can carry a heavy emotional load while being physically neutral. For Hobson, all this is evidence of the autonomic stimulation of various parts of the brain which are associated with different cognitive responses. Sleep disorders like somnambulism and night terrors provide further evidence. Once this is understood, he claims, complex systems of symbolic interpretation are no longer needed: the meaning of dreams is either obvious or obviously absent.



The Oxford Book of Dreams takes a contrasting approach to the same subject by rounding up a collection of dream accounts in fiction, poetry, diaries and letters from classical and modern literary sources, with fertile contributors like the Romantic poets, Proust, Tolstoy and Kafka well represented. It's arranged thematically – sex, death, animals, travel, violence, nightmares – with most of the absurd, transcendental or weird fortean material handily tucked away in the final section. How enjoyable it is depends entirely on the reader's ability to read several hundred loosely-themed and minimally-indexed transcriptions of other people's dreams in a row.

Both books make a solid attempt to be definitive within their own limits, but leave a nagging feeling that large chunks of the subject have gone missing somewhere. Cross-cultural perspectives are a good example. There's abundant and astonishing evidence of how hunter-gatherer cultures make many of their decisions about how and where to hunt and gather based on dreams, somehow using them as a practical tool for processing the vast amounts of data which they hold in their heads. In ancient Chinese, Greek and Mayan cultures, dreams were deliberately incubated, surrounded with elaborate and complex divination rituals. But we hear nothing of this sort from either book. For Hobson, such cultural manifestations represent the "pre-modern" understanding of dreams which has now been superseded by science; for Brook, they fall outside the Western literary canon from which his anthology is selected.

Both books can be recommended for those with the relevant special interests, but average dreamers may find themselves learning both more about dreams than they wanted to know, and also somehow less.

MIKE JAY

FORTEAN TIMES VERDICT

AUTHORITATIVE INTRODUCTIONS TO THE SCIENCE AND LITERATURE OF DREAMS **7 5**

THINGS COME TO LIFE

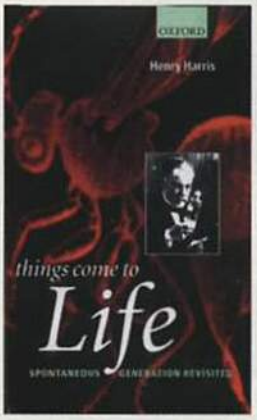
SPONTANEOUS GENERATION REVISITED

HENRY HARRIS

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2002
HB, 168PP, IND, NOTES, ILLUS, £20
ISBN 0 19 851538 3

Maggots from meat, glowworms from fallen logs, bees from bulls' carcasses, frogs and mice from Nile mud, serpents from human corpses... the idea that life can spontaneously generate itself out of dead or inorganic matter is an ancient one, and it remains strangely appealing. It took centuries of experimentation to finish it off, and some writers claim that it has re-emerged in theories of life's origin on early Earth – a claim efficiently dismissed in the Epilogue to *Things come to life*.

Henry Harris is both a historian of cell biology and an eminent practitioner of it, so he is well qualified for this swift and elegant canter through the story of spontaneous generation. The subject is of great fortean interest, not only for its sheer glorious weirdness, but also because it forms a fascinating case study in scientific method, its discontents and its slightly haphazard glories. Professor Harris is particularly strong on this. He vividly shows how modern microbiology emerged from a 200-year-long methodological ping-pong game between critics and defenders of spontaneous generation. Most of the former's experiments were based on purifying and sealing flasks of organic matter, and waiting to see if life developed inside. If larvæ appeared, then spontaneous generation remained a possibility; if not, then the maggots found in uncovered samples must have originated elsewhere, probably from eggs laid by insects. However, each time the experimenters refined their designs, their opponents found (ahem) a fly in the ointment. Almost any technique for purifying the contents of a flask – especially heating or boiling – could conceivably have destroyed the matter's vital force, or the air's "elasticity", or some other quality vital for life. Besides, the experiments regularly threw up anomalous results anyway. "The literature on spontaneous generation does not contain a single report in which it is claimed that an extensive series of experiments yielded an unblemished set of results."



Amazingly, as Harris points out, even when a final triumphant tweak of the experiment was conceived – Pasteur's "swan-necked" flasks, which filtered out micro-organisms without any need for heating – diehard spontaneous generationists *could* still have objected that the twisted necks did not admit enough fresh air for life to flourish. But by then they were too demoralised, for their theory was officially moribund. It was killed, not by the strictest processes of idealised experiment and logic, but by the gradual development of a pragmatic consensus. Harris perhaps allows himself a little too much facile mockery of spontaneous generation's last few gallants. But his defence of the slow, imperfect, carefully built consensus of science is convincing – and his exploration of how it emerged in the case of spontaneous generation is thorough and insightful.

This is a book of great value to all who are interested in scientific method, the history of ideas, or the wilder shores of biology.

SARAH BAKEWELL

FORTEAN TIMES VERDICT

FASCINATING CANTER THROUGH ONE OF BIOLOGY'S DEAD ENDS **8**

MISUNDERSTANDING CULTS

SEARCHING FOR OBJECTIVITY IN A CONTROVERSIAL FIELD

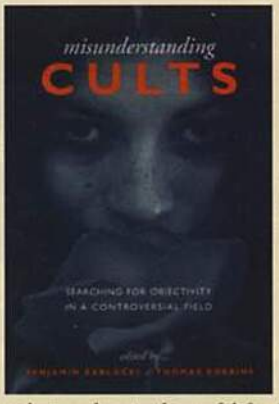
ED. BENJAMIN ZABLOCKI & THOMAS ROBBINS

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO PRESS, 2001
PB, 524PP, NOTES, APPX, $35.00
CAN/£22.50
ISBN 0 8020 8188 6

CULTS, RELIGION & VIOLENCE

EDS. DAVID G BROMLEY & J GORDON MELTON

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2002
HB, 249PP, IND, REFS, £15.95
ISBN 0 521 66898 0



In mediæval times, Jews were accused of poisoning wells and sacrificing babies. It was so common for Christian heretics to be accused of sodomy that the word "bugger" comes from the *bougres* (Bulgars), a Catharlike group of Bogomils in Bulgaria. But we no longer believe such foolishness, do we?

Today, there are two things we all know about cults, if you believe the anti-cultists and the tabloid newspapers. They use brainwashing to recruit and hold on to their members; and they're dangerous, each one a Waco just waiting to happen.

Both myths are comprehensively dismissed in these books. For the last 30 years, sociologists of religion have studied new religious movements in depth, to the extent of committing the Unforgivable Sin (so far as anti-cultists are concerned) of *talking* to their members and leaders, in the process finding out what they *actually* believe and do, rather than what their enemies accuse them of.

Brainwashing, in the popular sense, never has existed. The journalist who coined the term to explain why a few US soldiers captured in the Korean War apparently embraced communism, was actually a CIA agent, and most of what we "know" about brainwashing comes from CIA research. Most sociological research has comprehensively disproven the whole concept of brainwashing, but a few scholars, mainly psychologists, still argue for its existence, and for its supposed awesome power.

Misunderstanding Cults, unusually, brings together scholars from both sides of the divide, to argue their case in alternate chapters. For the brainwashing proponents, this was a huge mistake. Any *FT* readers familiar with the "Jesus was an Ancient Celtic lesbian Freemason astronaut" genre of speculative rewriting of history will immediately recognise the sloppy reasoning, the generalising from specifics, the careful selection of only those data which seem to support your case. Considering that these writers are social scientists with, presumably, a rigorous academic training, it is astounding how specious their arguments are.

On the other hand, just like "the Great Pyramid was a beacon for spaceships", their chapters tend to be a much more interesting read than the far more carefully argued debunking chapters; it's an unfortunate fact of life that few sociologists are decent writers. And because of this, regrettably, few people other than academics will bother to read this book and become acquainted with the latest research rightly dismissing "brainwashing" as an unscientific scare story.

Cult-watching sociologists, often accused by their enemies of being cult apologists, are on more difficult ground with the issue of violence. The last few decades have seen a number of horrific cases of new religions going bad, with group suicides/murders and the frightening attack of Aum Shinrikyo on the Tokyo underground. The writers in *Cults, Religion & Violence* do the only thing possible, and meet the reality head-on.

Again, much of this book would be, from the general reader's point of view, heavily academic. The first few chapters are theoretical, proposing possible models for violence ("Latent Tension, Nascent Conflict, Intensified Conflict, Dramatic Denouement" etc), and exploring how both government agencies and anti-cultists have had their part to play in creating the conditions for the final tragedies. Four fascinating chapters explore in detail the tragic ends of the Branch Davidians, Solar Temple and Heaven's Gate, and the Aum Shinrikyo atrocity, trying to find out not just what happened, but *why* it happened. And also demonstrating clearly that these cases, dreadful as they are, are *the exceptions*; most of the thousands of new religions rub along well enough with wider society, and of the very few that do have tensions, nearly all resolve them without bloodshed.

Cults, Religion & Violence doesn't pretend to have all the answers. It accepts that much more work needs to be done on the (albeit rare) problem of violence in new religions. And it accepts the sad likelihood that there will be more cases in the future; to underline this, the murder of 780 members of a Ugandan sect occurred while the book was in preparation, and 11 September shortly before publication (they are covered in the final chapter and the Prologue respectively). But a serious, level-headed book like this is of inestimably more value than any number of hysterical tabloid warnings about "Killer Cults in our Midst".

DAVID V BARRETT

FORTEAN TIMES VERDICT

SOUND SCHOLARSHIP ON A MUCH-MISUNDERSTOOD SUBJECT IN BOTH BOOKS **7 7**

JAY'S JOURNAL OF ANOMALIES

CONJURORS, CHEATS, HUSTLERS, HOAXERS, PRANKSTERS, JOKESTERS, IMPOSTERS, PRETENDERS, SIDESHOW SHOWMEN...

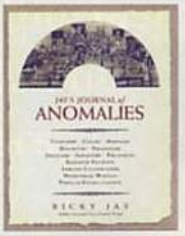
RICKY JAY

FARRAR STRAUS & GIROUX, NY, 2001
HB, 216PP, NOTES, IND, ILLUS, $40.00
ISBN 0 374 17867 4

Ricky Jay is arguably the most mainstream fortean in the world. He has appeared in recent Hollywood movies like *Boogie Nights*, *Tomorrow Never Dies*, and *Heist*. He has sold out off-Broadway for months with two recent shows, *Ricky Jay and His 52 Assistants* and *Ricky Jay: On the Stem*. His scholarly credentials include a stint as curator of the Mulholland Library of Conjuring and the Allied Arts and guest curatorships at Harvard, UCLA, and the American Antiquarian Society. And he has written several well-regarded and bestselling books. But his passion is the history of magic and strange performance: as he writes at the conclusion of his latest book, *Jay's Journal of Anomalies*, a collection of the 16 issues of his letterpress journal of the same name (which ran 1994–2000), "I really do love this stuff."

In his 1986 book *Learned Pigs & Fireproof Women*, Jay assembled a wondrous collection of material on mentalists, fire resisters, trained animals, armless calligraphers and painters, magicians, and other strange performers from the last few centuries in what was a fascinating history of odd (though in many cases hugely popular) entertainments.

In *Jay's Journal of Anomalies*, he returns to many of the themes of *Learned Pigs*, including extraordinary human and animal abilities, strange performance and entertainment, and, perhaps most important for Jay, deception. He takes on the performance artists of yesteryear, from ceiling walkers to artistes crucified on stage, from performance fasters to "grinners, gurners & grimaciers" (professional facial contortionists). The animal acts he celebrates range (in size) from the superstars of the flea circuses to the 'wond'rous' Bonassus (which bore a remarkable resemblance to the North American buffalo). He explores the obscure connections between dentistry and magic, and bowling and fraud, and reveals new information about two of the most famous stage magicians in history, Isaac Fawkes (d.1731) and John Henry Anderson (1814–1874). Indeed, whereas in *Learned Pigs*, Jay broke new ground simply by assembling so much exotic material, in his *Journal of Anomalies*, he probes his subjects more deeply and announces some intriguing discoveries, discoveries for the most part made and illustrated by reproductions from the obscure books, prints, pamphlets, broadsides and other ephemera in his own extensive collection. The revelations, the illustrations, and the evident affection for the strange – these are all reasons that *Jay's Journal of Anomalies* should be added to every fortean book collection.



WILLIAM M KLIMON

FORTEAN TIMES VERDICT

PURE MAGIC FROM THE MASTER **9**

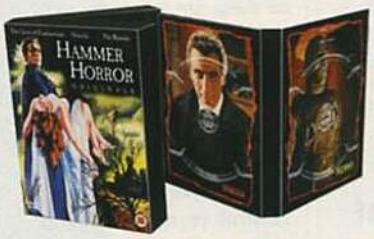
DVD

HAMMER HORROR ORIGINALS

The Curse of Frankenstein (1957); Dracula (1958); the Mummy (1959)
Warner Home Video
£29.99

British cinema in the 1950s was dominated by the monopolistic film empire of J Arthur Rank, whose gong-bashing icon was to be seen introducing the majority of our movie output through the decade. It was a cinema largely polarised between notions of unglamorous realism, inherited from the war years and exemplified by Ealing Studios' output, and escapist 'family' entertainment like the Norman Wisdom comedies and the 'Doctor' series. Towards the end of the decade, the cinematic landscape was radically changed by three new strands: the emergence of the so-called 'kitchen sink' film with *Room at the Top*,

the first entries in the bracingly vulgar 'Carry On' series, and the release of the first three Hammer horror movies.



The Curse of Frankenstein burst onto genteel British screens in a blaze of lurid Eastmancolour and, for the era, explicit gore. Critics were outraged, audiences flocked, and the effects on the future of horror cinema have reverberated ever since.

What Terence Fisher and the Hammer team achieved in this and their two subsequent outings – *Dracula* and *The Mummy* – was a radical re-imagining of the classic Universal horrors of the 1930s for a new generation. They launched Peter Cushing and Christopher Lee as the greatest horror double act since Lugosi and Karloff and, with their bold use of colour and Freudian undercurrents, they acted as the return of British cinema's repressed at a time when conservative forms of social realism and polite comedy threatened to smother it in parochialism.

The films were received, of course, with near-hysterical criticism by the British press. Looking back, its easier to see them as part of a long, if often unacknowledged, tradition in British cinema – the heirs of Powell and Pressburger, the Gainsborough melodramas of the 1940s and the filmed Penny Dreadfuls of Todd Slaughter – and an overdue reclaiming of Britain's heritage of gothic literature. In their influence on the rebirth of the genre worldwide, these early Hammer movies may actually be some of the most influential works to emerge from the UK's usually beleaguered film industry. Essential.

DAVID SUTTON

FORTEAN TIMES VERDICT

QUINTESSENTIALLY BRITISH GEMS OF GOTHIC CINEMA **10**

COMPETITION

THANKS TO WARNER HOME VIDEO, WE HAVE 5 SETS OF HAMMER HORROR ORIGINALS TO GIVE AWAY. TO WIN ONE, JUST TELL US:

WHAT WAS THE TITLE OF HAMMER'S SECOND DRACULA FILM?

Answers to: 'FT167 HAMMER HORROR COMPETITION' FREEPOST (SWB 1446), Patchway, Bristol, BS32 OZZ or by email to: forteantimes@cisubs.co.uk with 'FT167 Hammer Horror comp' as the subject line by 28 FEBRUARY 2002

THE DAMBUSTERS

just flight, £24.99
(www.justflight.com)

While flight sims don't usually hold much fortean interest, this excellent add-on for Microsoft's Combat flight Simulator 2 is an exception. Recreating the exploits of 617 Squadron – the 'bouncing bomb' raids on the Moehne and Eder Dams, the attack on the Tirpitz and many more – The Dambusters lets you take to the skies in specially modified Avro Lancasters (as well as Mosquitoes and Wellingtons) and relive some of the crucial hush-hush operations of World War II. This is splendid fun, with brilliantly recreated aircraft to pilot, beautifully designed scenery to enjoy and some extremely challenging flying to get to grips with. Flying forteans – as well as back room boys and boffins – will relish the opportunity to follow in the footsteps of Barnes Wallis and Guy Gibson. Wizard!

DAVID SUTTON

COMPETITION

THANKS TO OUR CHUMS AT JUST FLIGHT, WE HAVE FIVE SPECIAL DAMBUSTERS SETS (INCLUDING *THE DAMBUSTERS* AND MICROSOFT'S *COMBAT FLIGHT SIMULATOR 2*) TO GIVE AWAY. JUST TELL US:

WHAT WAS THE NAME OF GUY GIBSON'S DOG?

Answers to: 'FT167 DAMBUSTERS COMPETITION' FREEPOST (SWB 1446), Patchway, Bristol, BS32 OZZ or by email to: forteantimes@cisubs.co.uk with 'FT167 Dambusters comp' as the subject line by 28 FEBRUARY 2002.

THE X-FILES: THE TRUTH

20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, £15.99

Well, nine years on and Chris Carter's epic series finally draws to its conclusion. At last, it seems, there will be some answers... We're not giving anything away – except that it's out to buy on DVD and VHS from 27 January 2003... and that, thanks to 20th Century Fox you can win copies here!

COMPETITION

WIN A DVD PLAYER AND A COPY OF THE X-FILES: THE TRUTH! 4 RUNNERS-UP WILL EACH WIN A COPY OF THE DVD.

WHAT WAS THE NAME OF SCULLY'S DOG?

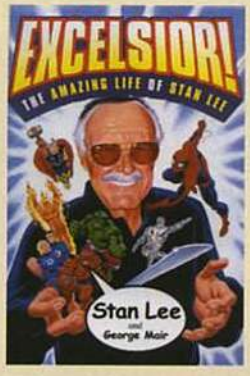
Answers to: 'FT167 X-FILES COMPETITION' FREEPOST (SWB 1446), Patchway, Bristol, BS32 OZZ or by email to: forteantimes@cisubs.co.uk with 'FT167 X-Files comp' as the subject line by 28 FEBRUARY 2002.

EXCELSIOR!

THE AMAZING LIFE OF STAN LEE

STAN LEE & GEORGE MAIR

BOXTREE, 2002
PB, 246PP, ILLUS, £18.99
ISBN 0 7522 6185 1



For me as, I'm sure, for many *Fortean Times* readers of A Certain Age, Stan Lee was the most influential writer of our childhoods. Michael Chabon acknowledges as much in his Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* (and even more his debt to Lee's legendary collaborator, Jack Kirby), which is set in New York during the early years of the American comic book industry and even gives Lee a small speaking role. Now comes Stan Lee's book.

Excelsior! has a somewhat odd structure necessitated by Lee's self-admitted terrible memory. The publishers got around the problem by hiring George Mair to research Lee's life, tie down the dates, and write a brief, descriptive biography into which Lee has interpolated anecdotal material written in his own inimitable style. This division of labour works extremely well. Mair's words appear throughout in italics, even the most cursory flick through the pages revealing that the vast bulk of the book is indeed Stan's own prose. His protestations at various points that, Marvel aside, he's lived a mostly unremarkable life are given the lie by fascinating reminiscences about growing up in a modest Jewish family in New York in the early part of the last century. One of the book's more surprising revelations is that, during WWII, he produced training and propaganda material as one of only eight US Army playwrights, among the others being Charles Addams, William Saroyan, Frank Capra, Ivan Goff and Ben Roberts (the latter two later to earn fame as major Hollywood scriptwriters).

Starting at Timely Comics (as Marvel was then called) in 1939, Stan saw them through the first superhero age and through succeeding waves such as the Western comics and the romance comics. In 1961, as the second age of superhero comics was getting underway at rival comics company DC, Stan penned the first issue of *Fantastic Four*. Drawn by Jack Kirby, this featured a team of super-powered explorers who in their early issues faced fantastic cryptozoological creatures, time-travel, aliens, Atlanteans, and evil scientists, a cornucopia of fortean encounters. Where DC's heroes had all the personality of cardboard, Lee's were fractious and opinionated and as likely to squabble as to automatically fight for the common good. Using this winning template, he went on to create a host of other superheroes including the Hulk, the X-Men, Daredevil, Iron Man and, of course, Spider-Man. There was another character who was wildly popular with students and hippies and who might be of particular interest to those of a fortean bent:

"People sometimes ask me if Dr Strange was based on any magicians I had known. In truth, I must admit I personally knew very few Masters of the Mystic Arts, especially ones who are able to leave their bodies and travel to different dimensions in their ectoplasmic forms.

"Writing Dr Strange was a hoot because it gave me the opportunity to make up weird expressions for him to say. Let's suppose he wanted to cast a mystic spell. Now what would you imagine a real magician would say when casting a spell? 'I'm gonna cast a spell!' Nope, that hasn't any flavour. 'Abracadabra!' Uh-uh, it's too old and hackneyed. No I liked to make up my own nutty sounding expressions, such as 'By the Hoary Hosts of Hoggoth, let the darkness shroud the light!' or, 'By the Mystic Moons of Munnipor, may your weapons turn to sand!'

"The funny part is, during many of my college lectures, there was always someone sure to ask 'Stan, my frat brothers and I have been wondering, is it true that you based Dr Strange's incantations on the writing of the ancient Druids?' Or, 'I've been researching Dr Strange's incantations and I feel you were obviously heavily influenced by translations from the Rosetta Stone and the Dead Sea Scrolls.'

"I hated having to admit I just dreamed this stuff up simply because I liked to use phrases that sounded dramatic to me. Now that I think of it, I've probably disillusioned countless fans on the lecture circuit over the years. It might have been kinder to say I was kidnapped by a flying saucer and taught those incantations before being released. In fact, we can't be sure it didn't happen that way, can we?"

Excelsior! takes the story of Stan's life from those heady early days at Marvel, through his time on the lecture circuit, his adventures in Hollywood, the recent debacle of online company Stan Lee Media, right up to the present. It's an easy, fascinating read well worth the time of anyone who has fond memories of the Silver Age of comics.

ROB HANSEN

FORTEAN TIMES VERDICT
BY THE HOARY HOSTS OF HOGGOTH! MAGNIFICENT! **9**

XTL

EXTRATERRESTRIAL LIFE AND HOW TO FIND IT

SIMON GOODWIN WITH JOHN GRIBBIN

WEIDENFELD & NICHOLSON, 2002
PB, 192PP, IND, ILLUS, £12.99
ISBN 1 84188 193 7

Over the past couple of years, there's been a glut of books arguing the scientific case for (or against) the likelihood of life on other planets. This latest, a slim but beautifully illustrated volume by stellar astronomer Simon Goodwin and veteran science writer John Gribbin, aims to provide an easy introduction to the subject, but disappointingly tells only half the story.

Despite its marketing-friendly title, *XTL* concentrates almost wholly on the search for planets that could potentially harbour life, and not the consideration of extraterrestrial life itself. It may be a subtle distinction, but it's the intermingling of biology and geology with astronomy that makes the scientific search for extraterrestrial life such an exciting field. The best books on the subject, such as *Here be Dragons* (OUP 2000, reviewed **FT137**) by astronomer David Koerner and biologist Simon LeVay, emphasise such a multidisciplinary approach.

Goodwin and Gribbins, however, confine themselves for the bulk of the book to the search for planets around other stars, with some consideration of likely signs of life such as oxygen and liquid water. As such it is an excellent introduction to the emerging field of extrasolar planetary astronomy, with a valuable list of the 60-odd planets that had been discovered as the book went to press at the end of 2000 (as of September 2002, Nasa had counted a total of 101, which goes to show the current rate of progress in the field). Goodwin also highlights some interesting anomalies among the planetary systems that have been detected, including one where at least one planet appears to orbit both stars

in a binary system, something that runs counter to current models of planetary formation.

But given the book's premise, it is frustrating to have the question of how life began on Earth – vital to our understanding of how life might arise on other planets – written off in a single paragraph. Goodwin also limits his brief speculation on the possibility of alien life to 'life as we know it', which takes half the fun out of it.

There is a good final chapter on recent and upcoming SETI projects, but the excitement is somewhat diluted by Goodwin's invocation of Fermi's Paradox – which basically states that if there was advanced life elsewhere in the galaxy, we'd have seen some sign of it.

Given that Goodwin estimates that at least one in 20 stars in our galaxy have planets, including at least half of all sun-like stars, the odds on finding signs of some kind of life appear fairly good. But if that life has more in common with pond scum than the wise space brothers of popular myth, it's discovery is hardly going to be "the most profound discovery in the entire history of human civilisation" that Goodwin claims.

Still, any book that closes with a full-page picture of the Metaluna Mutant from *This Island Earth* has to have something going for it.

TIM CHAPMAN

FORTEAN TIMES VERDICT
THE TRUTH IS OUT THERE. OR MAYBE IT ISN'T... **8**

PHRENOLOGOMIX

HUNT EMERSON

I'M GOING TO VISIT A PHRENOLOGIST!

PHRENOLOGY IS THE SCIENCE OF READING PERSONALITY FROM THE BUMPS ON THE SKULL. IT WAS POPULAR IN THE 18TH AND 19TH CENTURIES BUT HAS SINCE FALLEN OUT OF FAVOUR.
DOCTOR BONZ IS THE LAST REMAINING PHRENOLOGIST IN THE WORLD - SO MEETING HIM IS A GREAT PRIVILEDGE!

DOCTOR BONZ...

AH! COME IN, MR. BULL! SIT DOWN PLEASE... MY! WHAT A FINE NOBBLY HEAD YOU HAVE!

NOW LET ME SEE-- AH! VERY INTERESTING!

I CAN TELL YOU ARE A MAN OF INFLUENCE-- OF WEALTH!

THAT'S AMAZING, DOCTOR! AS IT HAPPENS, I'VE JUST WITHDRAWN £3000 IN CASH FROM MY BANK! YOU CAN TELL THIS FROM THE LUMPS ON MY SKULL?

OF COURSE! MY FINGERS CAN PLAY THE BUMPS AND PROTRUSIONS ON YOUR HEAD LIKE A MUSICAL INSTRUMENT! ANY REQUESTS?

PLAY 'RUN RABBIT RUN', BOSS! THAT'S MY FAVOURITE!

SILENCE, IGOR! I CAN READ YOUR HOPES AND DESIRES... YOUR PAST... YOUR FUTURE ... IT'S ALL THERE, IMPRINTED ON YOUR CRANIUM - THE FINGERPRINTS OF FATE!

Teehee-- TICKLES!

BUT THERE ARE TIMES WHEN THE PICTURE FALTERS... WHEN ONLY ONE LUMP IS NEEDED TO COMPLETE A GRAND PHRENOLOGICAL SURVEY... ONE LUMP, AND THAT LUMP IS MISSING!

WHAT DO YOU DO THEN, DOC?

WE CREATE A LUMP WHERE THERE IS NONE!

SPANG!

AH, YES! THIS IS MUCH BETTER! I CAN CLEARLY SEE YOUR FUTURE! YOU WILL LOSE SOMETHING OF VALUE-- SOMETHING CLOSE TO YOU...

BUT TAKE HEART! YOUR LOSS WILL BE OF BENEFIT TO OTHERS - NAMELY **ME!**

COME ON, IGOR - LET'S GET OUT OF HERE BEFORE AN ALARUM IS SOUNDED!

YES BOSS!

THE BURDEN OF GENIUS, IGOR! ALWAYS ONE STEP AHEAD OF THE DISBELIEVING MOB...

RUN, RABBIT RUN, RABBIT RUN-RUN-RUN...

CALL ME 24/7, I'VE GOT WHAT YOU NEED!

The Cheatmistress presents

CHEATS UNLIMITED

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C = 03
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Crazy Taxi
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D = 04
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I = 09
Icewind Dale 2
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J = 10
J.Bond: Agent Under Fire
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Jedi Knight 2
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K = 11
Kessen 2
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Knockout Kings 2002
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L = 12
L. of Kain: Blood Omen 2
Largo Winch
Legacy of Kain
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LMA Manager 2001
LMA Manager 2002
LMA Manager 2003
Lord of Rings Two Towers
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M = 13
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N = 14
Necronomicon
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Nightfire
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O = 15
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Onimusha 2
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Operation Winback
Outlaw Golf
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P = 16
Parasite Eve 2
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Q = 17
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R = 18
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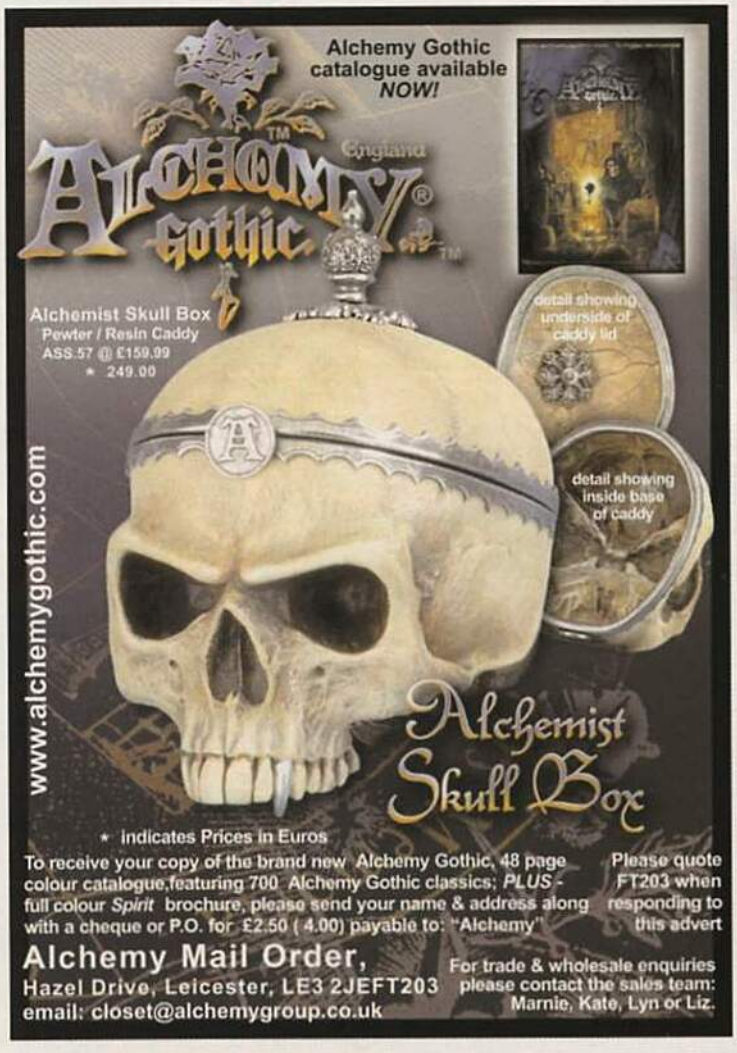
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IN HIS FORTRESS OF ARROGANCE, DEEP BELOW THE HIMALAYAS, THE IMMORTAL ASCENDED MASTER KNOWN AS THE HIEROPHANT TRAVELS THE MORE DISREPUTABLE PATHS OF FORTEANA...

Music is, regular readers will know, something rather dear to the Hierophant's heart. It has, however, always been a source of some disappointment to me that most of the musical efforts brought to my attention tend to fall into two categories, 'heavy' and 'metal'. Thankfully, all this has changed thanks to the efforts of the heroic efforts of one Mr James Richardson. Mr Richardson has just released an album under the title *Gonzo Science*, which according to its cover, is jam-packed with "science heresies, rogue paradigms, and phat beats." Apparently intended to pop a cap in the ass of such skizzeptics as may be in the hizzouse, Mr Richardson's opus contains such titles as 'Down With the Big Bang,' 'MoFo Aquatic Ape,' and – my favourite – 'Carl Sagan: Buzzhound'. Those who have had the privilege of actually hearing some of the album note that it contains such crazy mad rhymes as "In their zeal to defend the mundane, the skeptics have developed a pathological aversion to the anomalous". More at http://www.eartholo-gy.net/albums.htm. Yo! and suchlike.

KIERON DWYER

George Bush is, I fear, back again. A Mr Stew Webb – or rather, 'Stew Webb Federal Whistleblower', possibly related to the Berkshire Federal-Whistleblowers – writes, with rather more enthusiasm than coherence, that Mr Bush has not been a nice boy lately. As Mr Webb explains, "BUSH SATANIC HUMAN SACRIFICE – SUMMER-WINTER SOLSTICE – KNIGHT'S [sic] TEMPLAR – BUSH'S DOING SATANIC WORSHIP – 'TIFFANY LAMP MEETINGS' ". He continues in some detail: "June 22nd and December 21st each year, Satanist, perform Human Sacrifices as part of their Satanic rituals. These are known as the "Summer and Winter Solstice". During these rituals an Human Infant is killed and sacrificed to Satan (Baphemet-the Goat Headed Demon), and the Satanist drink the blood of the Infant Human they sacrifice, and Baphemet appears before them and goes out to kill the enemies of those satanist who perform this Human Sacrifice." Mr Webb has identified a group of high-ranking Satanists in the US, including such suspects as Bush père et fils, Henry Kissinger and the usual clutch of Rockefellers. This group, he explains, "is known as the USA 'Shadow Government with in the Government'. Leaders who dictate USA World Policy, that are known Satanists. A report of these events was given to the FBI-Denver Field Office on November 20th, 2001, Stating the above and that a murder of a child (infant) would take place, and that this Satanic murder, would involve the above named persons. YOUR USA FBI WILL DO NOTHING TO PREVENT THIS MURDER OF A CHILD BY THESE MEN."

It's a well-known fact that the best way to stop anyone finding out about one's top secret plans is to describe them in minute detail in an incredibly popular thriller calculated to hold particular appeal for the likes of David Icke. With this in mind, I am mildly intrigued by claims currently emanating from Mr Drew Hempel, an anti-fluoridation activist from the US. Mr Hempel warns that *The Matrix* is, in fact, nothing less than a dire prophecy of the outcome of a long-running plan by a group of high-ranking Freemasons and Theosophists. "In 1975 Oliver L Reiser and the World Institute editor Ervin Laszlo published the REAL MATRIX PLAN called 'Cosmic Humanism and World Unity'... This ACTUAL PLAN FOR THE MATRIX – is based on the work of HG Well's [sic] 'World Brain' concept exposed by Jim Keith and by the Omega Point of Teilard de Chardin – much praised by the CIA-controlled New Age scene and by President Clinton in "Nonzero: The Logic of Human Destiny." Humans will be in 'Techno-Samadhi' as the 'neuroblasts' and 'Electronic tubes' for the new 'World Mother.' In 'Techno-Samadhi' a person does not breath or think words – they are hooked up to the satellite systems and used as energy so that the Theosophist-Freemasons can create 'THE COSMIC LENS' that controls and manipulates higher dimensional space-time. This is all detailed in 'Cosmic Humanism and World Unity' – the ACTUAL PLAN FOR THE MATRIX." The sneaky so-and-sos. Our old friend Drunvalo Melchizadek (of the eponymous Domain) who, according to Mr Hempel, "states in his first book that the yin/yang ratios of mother nature are not infinite – a lie – and that the ratios of technological geometry are actually god and the future of a holographic matrix." Any clearer? Good.

It's been a curiously conspiracy-heavy column this month – possibly for reasons not unrelated to dark forces of which we know little – so in this spirit I'll leave you with news that it is rumoured that Bill Gates was seen holding a pair of testicles just before the mass suicide while receiving a case of Unabombs, implicating him in a sinister scheme to imminentize the Eschaton. What's more there's a whopping 79 per cent chance that this rumour is true. See what other gems you can get out of the Internet Conspiracy Generator at http://www.westword.com/extra/conspire.html

If you have a lead on any paranormal gossip, share it with the Hierophant... hierophant@ifgmags.com

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